

HER OWN SORT AND OTHERS



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CHARLES BELMONT DAVIS

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HER OWN SORT
AND OTHERS

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Kimball had played many love scenes with Natalie.

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HER OWN SORT AND OTHERS

BY
CHARLES BELMONT DAVIS

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ALL of their friends knew that it was only a question of the time and the place when Alan Godfrey would propose to Natalie Eyre. That he was going to propose was just as certain in their minds as it was that the good-looking, whimsical, poverty-stricken Natalie would accept so eligible a young man as Godfrey. They had been playing golf all afternoon and when the game was over Natalie suggested that, instead of stopping at the clubhouse, they return at once to Mrs. Goddard's, where she was staying and where they could have a quiet, peaceful chat over a cup of tea. Had it been her wish to hasten Godfrey's declaration, she could not more wisely have chosen the setting for the sentimental event. It was a brilliant, golden afternoon in late August. The two young people sat across a wicker tea-table under a canopy at the far end of the terrace. Below them stretched the calm blue waters of the ocean, and on the other side a wonderful lawn

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studded with spreading oaks through whose branches the sunshine filtered and fell in orange splotches on the Nile-green turf. The stage was set, the hour was at hand, and therefore Godfrey, in a few brief sentences, but every word of which came straight from the heart, told Natalie of his great love for her. When he had finished, he started to rise and go to the girl's side so that she might whisper the answer he had waited so long to hear, but, looking him steadily in the eyes, Natalie shook her head, and, with a slight gesture of her hand, motioned him away.

For a moment the confused, un-understanding eyes of Godfrey held those of the girl, and then his big frame settled slowly back into the depths of the low chair in which he had been sitting.

"Alan, dear," she began, "it would be foolish of me to pretend that I didn't know that you cared or that I had not expected that some day you would tell me so—just as you have told me. To be quite honest, it is about all that I have thought of for, oh, such a very long time. Because, you see, I knew that my answer would be the most important thing I would probably ever have to say in all my life. I love you, Alan, I am quite sure, more than I shall ever love any one—except, perhaps, myself."

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Hope flamed up in Godfrey's eyes and once more he started to rise, but again Natalie motioned him back. "I love you," she went on, "and I know that you would willingly grant me my every wish and every whim—that is, if you could."

Godfrey crossed his arms, pressed his lips into a straight line, and smiled grimly across the table.

"So far as material things go, Natalie," he said, "I can offer you a good deal. I know that there are other things that I cannot offer you. Do you mind telling me of which of these you were thinking?"

Natalie turned her eyes from Godfrey and, for a few moments, let them rest on the broad stretch of blue, sparkling waters, and then once more turned them back to the man.

"Oh, so many things, Alan," she said—"such a lot of things. You see, in a way, I lead two lives and you lead but one. From one of my lives I get the great happiness that comes from hard work and hard thinking—all I get from the other is physical luxury and plenty of healthy exercise. I'm tired of being a little daughter of the rich. Since my people died I have been really nothing but a well-bred, well-mannered grafter. I'm tired of luxury and I'm

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tired of the crowd that makes luxury possible for me—I mean your crowd, Alan, and my crowd.”

“Oh, I don’t know that it’s such a bad crowd,” Godfrey protested.

“Of course, it isn’t a bad crowd,” the girl agreed cheerfully. “It’s only the society journals and the Sunday supplements that try to make our sort vicious. But you and I know that they’re not vicious—we know they’re just amateurs—amateur farmers and amateur business men and amateur lovers. I want to try my luck against professionals. You mustn’t forget, Alan, that I’ve had two novels published already.”

“Yes, I know,” Godfrey laughed, “but to be quite fair, weren’t they published through Ned Powell and isn’t Powell the silent partner in the firm that published them?”

Natalie’s delicate pink-and-white coloring suddenly turned scarlet.

“Yes,” she threw at him, “that’s true enough, and it’s also true that with all Ned Powell’s influence back of them the books didn’t sell. But instead of reminding me of my failures, don’t you think it would be a trifle more kindly of you if you tried to hold out a little encouragement for the future? I think you

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would if you knew how really and truly I was a little sister of the rich. No one knows just how much what is vulgarly called a successful marriage would mean to me now. Not even you know how little there is between me and starvation. Believe me, Alan, there are not many girls in my position who would throw you over just because they wanted to make good on their own. If you——”

“Oh, that’s all right, Natalie,” Godfrey interrupted. “It’s not that I’m not appreciative, so much as it is that I’m selfish. You see, I want you all for myself in this world of amateurs. And as for you being near starvation, that’s just plain morbid. There are a whole lot of things between you and starvation—there’s me, for instance, and there’s Mrs. Goddard, and—and lots of good friends who would consider it a very great privilege to help you over the hard places.”

Natalie shrugged her shoulders and brought the talk to a blunt and almost brutal end by rising from her chair and holding out her hand.

“Thank you, Alan,” she said, “but it’s the hard places that make life worth the living—especially if one tries to get over them unaided. But don’t ever talk to me again of marriage as you have just now.

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You know you're a good deal of a temptation, Alan. I'll be leaving Newport in a few days, but of course I'll see you before I go?"

Godfrey was standing very close to the girl and holding her hand in both of his own. For the first time he seemed to realize that all of his hopes, all of the plans he had made for the future had come to naught and that in his great ambition he had failed miserably.

"Why, yes, Natalie," he stammered, "of course I'll see you again—many times, I hope. But what are you going to do when you leave here, especially—I mean——"

"You mean especially when I'm broke," Natalie interrupted. "Why, Alan, I'm going back to town and try my luck against the real workers, and—loose myself from my old friends. The next time you see me, it may be behind a counter, or pounding the keys of a typewriter in the office of one of your broker friends, or singing and dancing in the chorus of a musical comedy. I don't know. But I do know that for the present, at least, I've got to break away from my old life and—and you, Alan. I'm too weak to try any half-way course."

"I'm sorry," Godfrey said gravely, and, raising

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the girl's hand, touched it with his lips. "Good-by, Natalie and good luck to you," he added, and then, suddenly turning his broad shoulders toward the girl he loved, swung off across the sunlit lawn.

During the six months that followed, Natalie Eyre did some of the things she had told Alan Godfrey that summer afternoon that she was going to do. And although during that period she was never starved, there were moments when she would have greatly relished better food and more of it. She did not try to be a stenographer, because she had not had the necessary training, but she did do some clerical work in a publishing house, as well as posing for several artists who made illustrations and covers for the magazines. Although with small practical success, she had continued her literary labors, and, on account of her fragile and flower-like beauty, had been given a very small part in the ballroom scene of a drama of modern society. It so happened that the play was a success, and therefore, night after night, in the front rows and in the boxes, Natalie recognized many of her former friends. To their frequent invitations to join them at supper she always replied that her work prevented her from going anywhere.

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But, work and study as she might, she soon discovered that without personal or financial backing advancement on the stage came very slowly, and in her search for a better position she continued to haunt the offices of the managers and the theatrical agencies. It was a hard, sordid road that she had chosen to follow, but the art of acting interested her exceedingly, and, above all, she wished to prove to Alan Godfrey and the friends of her more affluent days that she was capable of earning her own livelihood. This, at least, she did, but it was often at great privation to her physical well-being. After a short time, however, she became fairly callous to her material needs and her only annoyance was caused by the question that was constantly presenting itself to her mind as to whether or not her moral outlook on life had undergone any radical change. For a time after she had begun her career on the stage, she had maintained for her work and for the people who worked with her her former view-point, which was the larger one of the outsider. But of late she was conscious that there had been a subtle but ever constant change, and that more and more she now thought and talked in the terms of the theatre. Now she no longer read theatrical newspapers with the

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single purpose of finding opportunities for bettering her position, but because the news and even the gossip of her fellow actors interested and amused her. By degrees their narrow world had become her world. The key to the door that led to the big outside world she still clutched tightly in her hand, but of late there had been moments when she felt that even this was slipping from her grasp. The men of her profession with their pompous, unnatural manners, and the women with their petty jealousies and their ceaseless scandal, she gradually came to accept at their own inflated value. In considerably less than a year her transition to Broadway had become complete and its people had become her people.

It was at a supper-party of theatrical folk in the early spring that she met the manager of one of the big moving-picture concerns. Attracted by Natalie's beauty and the look of aristocratic breeding that showed in every feature of her face and every line of her slight, lithe body, he offered her a position in his regular stock company, and she accepted the offer. For a few weeks, twice a day, Natalie made the long, tedious trip between town and the studios of the Globe Film Company at Sheepshead Bay, but at last the effort became too strenuous

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and she moved her few belongings to Sheepshead village. Here, in comparative comfort, she settled in a big, airy room in Mrs. Cragin's boarding-house, where all of the other guests were actors and actresses employed by the same company with which Natalie had cast her fortunes. Therefore, in her hours of ease as well as those of work she found herself constantly in the company of her fellow players. It was a small world complete in itself, and served to sever the last link that had connected her with her former life of luxurious ease. Now she worked from nine o'clock in the morning until late in the afternoon and often far into the night. But if her hours of work were long and arduous, they were rewarded with a prompt success. Her lovely features and the supple grace of her movements seemed peculiarly adapted to motion pictures, and in a brief space of time she was playing fairly important parts and her position with the company was assured.

Among the actors who lived in Mrs. Cragin's boarding-house with Natalie was Hugh Kimball, the leading man of the Globe Film Company. He was a good-looking young man in the early thirties, but in spite of his youth had spent many years in stock companies and was not unknown to the audiences

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of Broadway. In the world of moving pictures he was already one of its best-known and most brilliant ornaments. His name had been persistently advertised throughout the broad land and his good-looking, clean-cut features were known to every girl and every woman in every town that boasted of a moving-picture theatre from Maine to Texas. By the small army employed by the Globe Company he was petted and spoiled and regarded as something a little better than other humans, and at the boarding-house which he honored with his presence he was easily the star guest. He enjoyed the luxury of an entire suite of rooms, and in his spacious parlor he frequently gave parties to the other boarders and to the many moving-picture actors and actresses who lived in the neighborhood. Hugh Kimball was indeed a king among his fellows, and so often had he been assured of this fact that any early suspicion he may have had as to its truth had long since developed into a certainty. His pride and vanity showed in his eyes, in the way he carried his chin and shoulders, and whether he wore doublet and hose or evening clothes or a fur overcoat he always moved as if clad in the armor of a gallant knight. Until Natalie Eyre joined the forces of which he was the leading spirit,

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he had politely but firmly refused the more or less flagrant advances of most of the ladies and had treated them all with chilling civility. But from the moment that he first saw Natalie Eyre he seemed to find something about her not possessed by the others, and it was but natural that the attention of Kimball should cause Natalie no small amount of satisfaction and pleasure. During the long spaces of time when they were waiting for their "scenes" at the studios, it flattered her to be seen so constantly in the company of the great Kimball, the admired of all women. At the boarding-house he was equally attentive, and on warm spring evenings he frequently asked her to dine with him at one of the many restaurants or road-houses in the neighborhood. If on such occasions the good-looking actor talked a great deal of his successes on the stage and off of it, if he spoke with confidence of the triumphs that awaited him, it was at least a language with which during the past year Natalie had become entirely familiar. When, with a certain ring of awe in his voice, Kimball referred to his exalted position, Natalie was pleased to regard him from his own view-point, and whenever he left a restaurant without being recognized by the other

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guests and complained in peevish tones at the oversight, she was quite sincere in her sympathy.

One Saturday afternoon, when Natalie happened to be free, she went to New York to do some shopping, and outside of a Broadway theatre saw the advertisement of a moving picture in which she had appeared. From pure curiosity, she entered the theatre and took a seat at the back of the darkened, half-filled auditorium. The film which she had come to see was already being shown on the screen and for some moments she sat smiling at a love scene between herself and Hugh Kimball. And then, she suddenly became conscious of the fact that the two girls sitting directly in front of her were talking about herself and the popular leading man.

"They say he's crazy about her," one of the girls whispered. "It certainly looks like it when you see the way he grabs her in the picture, doesn't it?"

"It sure does," the friend giggled audibly. "I wish *I* had her job."

"No chance," sneered the first gossip. "I know a girl who has an aunt down at Sheepshead, and she says he never lets her out of his sight, day or night. They both live at the same boarding-house.

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Pretty soft for Hughie, eh?" And at this witticism, both girls giggled long and loudly.

Natalie felt that her face had suddenly turned scarlet, and she half rose, but, remembering that no one could see her in the darkness, she once more settled back in her seat. The resentment that she had at first felt toward the girl who had told the scandal vanished as quickly as it had come, and a few minutes later, the thought that Kimball's devotion to her was public property even brought a smile to her pretty lips. The sudden blush of shame was but an inheritance from her former self, and after all was but purely physical. She watched the film to the last picture, when Kimball and she were shown in a passionate embrace. Then, with the memory of the picture still filling her mind, she went out into the sunshine of Broadway.

"Marloe's Mummy" was the name of the play in which Natalie had, so far in her career, made her most ambitious effort. The plot of the comedy was the old one of the mummy who is bought in Egypt, shipped to America, and, by the transfusion of a magical elixir, eventually brought to life. Natalie played the mummy which in its former life had been a true princess royal of the Nile, and Hugh Kimball

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was the millionaire who had purchased her in her mummy clothes, and eventually, having married her, installed her as the chatelaine of his Fifth Avenue home as well as his summer palace at Newport. Throughout the long hot days of August Natalie, dressed in the filmy, diaphanous robes of the princess, and Kimball and the others, clad in modern clothes, had played the scenes that were supposed to take place in and about New York. The heavier part of the work was over and one day at Newport would be all that was necessary to complete the remaining scenes. Abe Feldman, the business manager, had gone on in advance, and on the last day of August he wired that he had secured permission to use the grounds of one of Newport's finest estates and that the company and camera men should leave New York that same night by the Fall River boat.

It was a brilliant moonlight night, and when they had finished their dinner Natalie and Kimball sought a secluded spot on the upper deck where undisturbed they could whisper their confidences and enjoy the glories of the perfect night. For a long time they sat in silence, while Kimball smoked innumerable cigarettes and Natalie looked out on the placid waters and the distant rim of shore bathed in the soft white

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light of the silver moon. They were sitting very close together, shut off from the sight of prying eyes by a huge life-boat, and so, when Kimball put out his hand and laid it on Natalie's and gently pressed it, the girl made no sign of resentment. During the past few months Kimball had played many love scenes with Natalie in which he had embraced and kissed her with all the outward signs of a true lover's passion. But then they had been in the open sunlight, or in the studios under the blazing glare of hundreds of electric lights, with a camera clicking in their faces and a director shouting his orders to them through a megaphone. Now it was all quite different. The two young people were alone in the moonlight, and Hugh Kimball was just a man and Natalie Eyre a woman, and the touch of his hand thrilled her as no kiss of the stage had ever thrilled her. For a brief moment she turned her eyes to his, and in return he smiled a smile of happy, boyish content and once more pressed her soft, delicate hand.

When he spoke, it was quite evident from the very first sentence that he had much to say and that his opening remarks would be only as a preamble to the matter of real import to which he was to refer later on.

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"In the first place," he began, "I want to tell you something of my people. We came not far from the very town where we are going now—Newport. But of course we had nothing to do with the gay life of that resort of fashion. We were just simple Rhode Island farmer folk—honest but plain. My people still live on the farm where I was born, and during my vacations I often go back to see the old folks and do my best to brighten up their declining years. You might think that I would prefer the gayer summer resorts where I would be well known and—and perhaps made much of and sought after."

From the depths of her low chair Natalie looked steadily at the cameo profile of the popular leading man, and her lips wavered into a whimsical little smile. What if he were vain, she argued, it was, after all, only the vanity of a spoiled child. There was so much to like and admire about Kimball, and she could never quite free her mind from the truly feminine thought that he was so greatly loved by so many women. The woman who married Hugh Kimball and who could hold his love would indeed be one to be envied. As far back as she could remember, Natalie had always rejoiced in doing the thing that was least expected of her. To refuse Alan

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Godfrey and his millions had caused her a certain satisfaction if only because it had astonished her friends, and to marry a moving-picture actor she knew would cause them even greater astonishment, and she smiled pleasantly at the prospect. And then, she became conscious that Kimball was still telling her of his early struggles, and the thought occurred to her that when Hugh talked about himself it was always in the manner of a toast-master at a banquet enumerating the virtues of the distinguished guest of the evening. But Natalie had come to love the very naïveté of the man, and long since she had convinced herself that beneath his braggadocio there were concealed the heart and soul of a real man and a true lover.

“As to your family,” she heard him saying—“as to your past, I know nothing and I ask to know nothing. I am satisfied to take you as you are. To me the day of your birth will always be the day I first saw you. All I ask of you, Natalie, is your love and your life.”

She felt his strong arm about her drawing her slight body closely to him. Unresisting her lips met his, and, as he gently released her, she heard him whisper: “That is your promise, Natalie?”

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“Why, yes, Hugh,” she said; “of course, that is my promise.”

Abe Feldman was waiting for the company at the Newport pier, and although it was extremely early in the morning his enthusiasm over the success of his own efforts was very great. When they were all crowded into a large 'bus and were on the way to the hotel, he told them that he had not only secured the use of the lawns and gardens of one of the very finest places on the Ocean Drive, but that the gracious lady owner, who happened to be giving a large luncheon party that afternoon, had promised to use her best efforts to induce her guests to appear as supers in the pictures.

“It's a great ad for the Globe Company,” he said, beaming on the actors, “and a great chance for you all to break into swell society. We'll get a close slant at them, anyhow, and see what they're like on their own feeding-grounds.”

Of all of this Natalie heard but little. Through the windows of the barge she was looking out on the narrow, sunlit streets and the landmarks which had once been so familiar to her. Of the hotel where Feldman had said they were to stay, she had never

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even heard the name. She was entering a village which a year before had been as her own home, but now she came by a new road and as a stranger, and, in the new order of things, she knew that after a brief glimpse of its glories as a stranger she would leave it. For the first time in many months, she realized how completely she had submerged herself in her new life and how thoroughly she had shut herself off from her old friends and the world in which they moved. Her world was now the studios of the film company that employed her and Mrs. Cragin's boarding-house at Sheepshead Bay. Her friends were now the tired, travel-worn, perspiring men and women who crowded the omnibus and who with but a mild show of interest were listening to Abe Feldman tell of his experiences with what he was pleased to designate the "nobs of Newport."

To Natalie the words of the excited Feldman at last took form, and, but half understanding, she smiled at the fat, shining face of the manager and asked:

"Who is it that owns these wonderful grounds where we are to play?"

"Mrs. Alexander Goddard's her name," the manager said, "and believe me, she's some swell—one of the

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kind you read about in the papers. You know, the sort that has grand op'ry stars after dinner to sing swell ballads at a thousand a throw, and invites live monkeys in to lunch to entertain her guests."

Hugh Kimball majestically folded his arms and sniffed audibly.

"And being out of monkeys just now," he hurled at the well-meaning Feldman, "I suppose she's willing to let us act out on her lawn to amuse her friends. I wonder if they'll feed us peanuts?"

Huddled in the corner of the rumbling omnibus, Natalie, her face flushed, her hands clasped tightly before her in her lap, with wide-open, unseeing eyes stared straight before her. For some reason it had never occurred to her that, so long as she purposely kept out of their way, that there was the most remote chance of being brought into immediate contact with, or even of seeing, any of her former friends. She had come to Newport as a moving-picture actress just as she had gone to many other towns where she knew no one and was herself unknown. But now it seemed that the stage chosen for her work was to be the home of a very old and a very dear friend, where, almost as a daughter of the house, she had lived for many months at a time. And if what Feld-

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man had said was true, she would not only meet Mrs. Goddard again but Mrs. Goddard's friends, who would be sure to be her friends, too. Her unhappy, distressed mind was suddenly filled with a picture of herself in the bespangled, transparent robes of the Princess of the Nile wandering about and being made to perform foolish antics on the sunlit lawn. With a slight shudder, the girl instinctively raised her hands and pressed them against her eyes as if to shut out the miserable scene. During the long morning hours that followed, shut up in her room at the hotel, her confused brain conjured up many schemes whereby this impossible situation might be averted. If she refused to act, she would have to resign or be discharged from the company which had always treated her with consideration and with whom she had won an assured and profitable position. And, in addition to this, her promise to Kimball of the night previous made it almost imperative that she continue her present work. To falter now would be to turn her back on the road she had voluntarily chosen to follow. It would not be playing the game, and it had long been one of Natalie's boasts that she always played the game.

When Abe Feldman and his company arrived at

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their destination, Mrs. Goddard and her guests were still at luncheon, and therefore, while the manager and his camera men arranged the preliminaries, the actors and actresses gathered in groups on the broad porches of the house. Somewhat surprised but promptly acceding to Natalie's request, Kimball had left her to join the others, and when she was alone she dropped into a low wicker chair and, for some time, looked out on the velvety lawn, and now and again cast furtive glances at her fellow players. Their faces were made up, but they wore modern clothes, as the play demanded they should. Natalie had seen these same clothes many times before at the studios and there they had seemed appropriate enough, but now on Mrs. Goddard's porch they appeared wholly out of place and rather absurd. In the brilliant sunshine the dresses of the women looked cheap and tawdry and the men's clothes frayed, baggy at the knees and shiny at the elbows. Even the tweed morning suit that Hugh Kimball wore, with its padded shoulders and narrow waist, appealed to Natalie's now sceptical sight as looking rather like an advertisement for men's ready-made clothing. The heavily beaded eyelashes of the women and the rouge on their cheeks, and the smooth pink-and-white

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make-ups of the men, made them all look rather inhuman and almost uncanny in the broad light of day. Of all the company Natalie was the only one who appeared in costume, and, with a slight shiver of dismay, she pulled the long coat she wore more tightly about her filmy draperies. And then, from the house she heard a confusion of sounds of talking and laughter, and she saw Mrs. Goddard, followed by her guests, come out on the porch. In a moment Natalie was on her feet and moving swiftly toward her former friend. With a little cry of surprise the elder woman held out her arms and fairly smothered Natalie in her embrace.

"My dear child," she cried, "what are you doing here with your pretty face all made up, and what have you got under that heavy coat this broiling day? What do you mean by not letting me know you were in town, and why didn't you come in to lunch?"

"I couldn't," Natalie laughed. "I'm a working-girl now—a queen of the movies." All she said after this was lost in a chorus of noisy exclamations, and she found herself in the centre of a circle of Mrs. Goddard's excited, eager guests and violently shaking hands with Alan Godfrey. After Godfrey had

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been induced by the others to give up Natalie's hands, she became the recipient of a greeting the warmth of which fell little short of an ovation. Old ladies embraced her tenderly, young girls of her own age kissed her enthusiastically on both of her rouged cheeks, and men, young and old, wrung her soft, pretty hands until they fairly ached. Perhaps it was on account of her aching hands or perhaps it was from some other cause, but when the excitement of the first greetings was over there were tears in Natalie's eyes, tears that could not be restrained; and therefore she put her arms about Mrs. Goddard and laid her head on the ample bosom of her old friend and in a low, husky voice whispered: "I never knew you all cared so much. Why didn't somebody tell me?"

Mrs. Goddard smoothed the soft hair of the head lying on her breast and said: "Because, you little fool, you *would* be a working-girl and you refused to give any of us the chance to tell you *anything*. Now that we've found you again, I hope you'll be good."

When Natalie raised her head and, looking about her, smiled, through her glistening eyes she caught sight of the moon face and the rotund figure of Abe

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Feldman, who by slow and easy stages had approached within a few feet of the charmed circle.

"Oh, Mrs. Goddard," Natalie said, "I want to present Mr. Feldman to you. Mr. Feldman is our manager."

The little man doubled up in a bow so low that his shining, perspiring, bald head almost touched his massive watch-chain. In turn he was presented by Mrs. Goddard to her guests, who with great enthusiasm accepted his invitation to join his company and, for a few brief hours, to perform the work of "extra" people in the moving-picture drama of "Marloe's Mummy."

Throughout the long, hot afternoon the cameras continued to click off thousands of feet of films that were destined to make Natalie Eyre and Hugh Kimball famous and Mrs. Goddard and Mrs. Goddard's friends, if not famous, at least better known throughout the broad land. The embarrassment which Natalie had at first felt in the situation was quickly forgotten in her work, and in the enthusiasm with which her old friends entered into the execution of what appealed to them as a novel and amusing experience.

The day's work was nearly over and the oak-trees were casting giant shadows on the lawn, when the



Throughout the long, hot afternoon the cameras continued to click off thousands of feet of films.

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unhappy incident occurred. Natalie and Kimball had the green bit of lawn which served as the stage to themselves and were in the middle of a very serious and passionate love scene when something went wrong with the camera. The scene came to an abrupt end, and Natalie turned to speak to her friends who were standing in a group at the side of the sylvan stage. Caught unaware, she saw by their faces and their manner that, instead of being seriously interested, they were laughing at and quietly guying the heroic efforts of Kimball to make love as love is supposed to be made by an American gentleman and a Newport millionaire. Confused and blushing scarlet under her rouge, Natalie cast a hurried glance at Kimball, and seeing him still staring at the broken camera, found some consolation in the thought that he too had not seen the smiles of ridicule on the faces of her old friend's guests.

A little later on, when the last scene had been taken and the film of "Marloe's Mummy" was an accomplished fact, Abe Feldman and his company of players gladly accepted Mrs. Goddard's invitation to stay for tea with her. While the tired but contented actors gathered about the pretty tables on the porches, Hugh Kimball saw a young man speak to

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Natalie and then from the corner of his eye watched them stroll slowly across the lawn in the direction of the terrace that overlooked the sea.

When Natalie and Alan Godfrey had reached the terrace, they sat down in the same two wicker chairs which they had occupied on a very momentous occasion just about one year before.

"Same two old chairs, same girl," Godfrey said, and laughed a rather mirthless sort of laugh.

Natalie drew her coat tightly over the spangled bloomers of the Princess of the Nile, and her rouged, scarlet lips wavered into a brilliant, dazzling smile. Whatever may have been in the girl's heart, it was her great wish to have this talk with Godfrey as cheerful as possible.

"Same chairs," she laughed, "but not quite the same girl."

"But you've succeeded, haven't you?" Godfrey asked.

Natalie nodded. "Yes, I suppose so. I make my own living and a pretty good living at that. But I'm sorry I came back here to-day."

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know, except it was rather like the return of the prodigal daughter. The fatted calf

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sort of choked me and made me cry. And, then, of course, everything about the place reminds me of a lot of things I haven't got any more and, until to-day, that I hadn't really missed."

"True friends, perhaps?" Godfrey suggested.

But Natalie refused to be serious.

"No," she said; "the true-friends idea didn't appeal to me so much as a great longing I had for a plunge into the surf at Bailey's Beach. And then, all of the time I was acting out there on the lawn my mind was really on the golf-links. I was thinking what fun it would be to be standing on a nice flat tee with a little white ball at my feet and a good whippy driver in my hands and the fair green stretching out before me. And then a sweet stroke, a swish, and the ball flying straight and true and leaping in great bounds over the smooth turf, missing the traps and skimming the bunkers and— Oh! I don't know, but it was a rather pleasant dream."

"You're not much in the open?"

Natalie shook her head. "No, not very much. Sometimes we work out-of-doors but most of our scenes are in the studios, and believe me, the heat of the lights is awful. What have you been doing, Alan, all this long year?"

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With a sudden look of surprise Godfrey stared steadily at Natalie until the girl's eyes, tired after her long afternoon's work, faltered and turned toward the open sea.

"Why, you know, Natalie, dear," he said. "Of course you must know that I have been doing just what I did the year before and the year before that, and ever since I have known you. There is only one real thing in my life—and I suppose always will be—my love for you. Even if you wouldn't let me see you all of this time and hid yourself from me, I knew that you knew that I was waiting. Surely you understood, Natalie?"

The girl glanced up at Godfrey and then toward the sea and then back to Godfrey's searching eyes.

"Why, yes, Alan," she said, "in a way I understood. But, you see, I have been working so hard, and in my work I found other interests and—and other friends."

Natalie's hand was lying on the arm of her chair and Godfrey suddenly put out his own hand and took that of the girl in a firm grasp.

"You mean that there is some one else?" he asked.

Through misty eyes Natalie looked into the frightened eyes of Godfrey.

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"Yes, Alan," she whispered, "there is some one else."

She drew the lapels of her coat more closely over her breast, and then, after a few moments of silence, wearily pulled herself to her feet.

"It's getting rather cold," she said, "and I'm afraid the others will be going back to the hotel. You know we return to New York to-night by the boat. Be a good boy, Alan, and take me back to the house with you now, won't you?"

After Natalie had returned to the hotel she went to her room, so that she might be alone until supper-time, when it would be necessary for her to meet Kimball and the others. The events of the day had upset her greatly and she was tired and nervous and on the verge of breaking down and crying. Try as she might, she could not forget the look in Alan Godfrey's eyes, and she could not forget the scene when the camera had broken down and she had caught the crowd laughing at and silently guying Hugh Kimball, the king of the moving-picture world and the man she had promised to marry. For some time she lay on the bed in the little hotel room staring wide-eyed at the whitewashed walls; and then some

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one knocked and, going to the door, she found Kimball waiting to be admitted.

“Just a few words,” he said, and, without waiting for Natalie’s consent, came into the room and closed the door behind him.

Natalie offered him a chair, but Kimball refused, and, going over to the fireplace, took his stand before the empty grate and slowly clasped his hands behind his back.

“I have been taking a walk,” he began, “and—and thinking. It occurred to me that unless there should have to be some re-takes ‘Marloe’s Mummy’ is finished—that is, so far as you and I are concerned. And then it struck me how much better it would be for you, and for me, too, if you did not return to New York to-night but remained on here with your friends.”

Natalie was sitting on the edge of the bed, her elbows resting on her knees, her chin cupped in her palms, and her eyes fixed steadily on Kimball.

“I don’t think I understand you, Hugh,” she said. “Why shouldn’t I go back with you? Have you forgotten that we were to have another long evening together on the boat in the same little hiding-place that we discovered last night?”

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“No, Natalie,” he said, “I hadn’t forgotten that.” For a few moments he hesitated, and during this brief interval of silence Natalie noticed the curious change that had taken place in the man’s manner and in the way he carried himself. There was no longer the strut or the old air of braggadocio about him, and in all ways he seemed so much more simple and human.

“Last night,” he went on, “I said that I wanted to marry you just because you were you and I said that I didn’t care to know anything of your past. Of course, that was very foolish of me, but I didn’t know how foolish it was until I learned something of your past to-day. I envy you such—such pleasant and prosperous friends.”

“What difference does it make,” Natalie asked, “who my friends happen to be, so long as we care for each other?”

Kimball shook his head and forced a mirthless smile to his parched lips.

“It will seem very strange,” he said, “to go back to Sheepshead Bay and to Mrs. Cragin’s without you. I don’t think I ever told you that just before you came to live there that I was going to move away. Well, I was. I hated the place then. But

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after you came everything was quite different. In what to me before had been a God-forsaken, cast-off racing-town I found a quaint, deserted village. I forgot the forlorn cottages and the neglected gardens and saw only the flowers that still pushed their way through the weeds. Pleasant evenings those, Natalie, when we walked down by the sea and had our little dinners together at the corner table at Kettler's. Do you——”

“Hugh, dear,” Natalie interrupted him, “I don't understand you at all. Why should you talk like this—as if everything was over between us?”

Staring at the wall before him, apparently unconscious of Natalie's presence, Kimball, in the same even voice, went on to say what he had so evidently come to say.

“There was a young man there to-day—the young man with whom you took a walk and with whom you remained some time on the terrace. From a remark I happened to overhear, the young man had evidently been an old flame of yours. Why, even I, a stranger, could see in his eyes how he loved you, and in your eyes how you loved him. But even if I were mistaken”— For a moment the actor stopped, and slowly moistened his dry lips with his tongue. “Even

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if you and this young man do not love each other as I'm sure you do," he went on, "there was something else that happened—something that pointed out to me the barrier that would always rise between us two and happiness."

Natalie started to rise and go to Kimball, but with a quick, nervous movement he motioned her back.

"It happened when the camera went wrong. I suddenly glanced about at your friends and I saw that they were laughing at me—I suppose at my pompous ways and my exaggerated clothes. It wasn't necessary for them to laugh to make me understand the difference. God knows, I'd seen it all through the afternoon."

"Don't you think, Hugh," Natalie said, "that perhaps you are wrong—just a little tired from overwork, and—and morbid?"

"Don't think that I blame them," Kimball went on. "I've often wondered why we actors are as we are. I've sometimes thought it must be the foot-lights. They flare up between us and the audience and to look like human beings we've got to paint our faces, and to act like real people we've got to exaggerate our manners and grimace and gesticulate

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like monkeys. And then in time we come to exaggerate off the stage and pose and assume a grand manner and wear loud clothes. We're no worse nor better than your friends I met to-day—the only difference is that we always have our make-ups on." He crossed the room to where Natalie sat, and held out both his hands. "And now it's good-by, my dear. You'd better let me tell Feldman that you're not returning with us. I can fix it more easily than you."

For a few silent moments Natalie held the outstretched hands tightly in both her own.

"Thank you," she said at last, "and good luck to you, Hugh, and God bless you always. Tell them at Mrs. Cragin's that I'll be there pretty soon to see them all and to get my things. And I'll see you there too, won't I, Hugh?"

Kimball dropped the girl's hands and, as if afraid to meet her eyes, stared steadily at the blank wall beyond.

"I'm afraid not," he said. "You see, I'll be leaving Sheepshead very soon. The place will be so full of ghosts and—" Again he hesitated, and then went on in the same even voice. "But you'll be sure to be

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dropping in at the moving-picture shows sometimes, won't you, whatever you happen to do?"

"Why, of course, Hugh," Natalie said, "lots of times. I'll never forget my love for the movies. Why do you ask that?"

The question seemed to embarrass Kimball, and, for the first time since she had known him, he had difficulty in finding the words with which to express himself.

"I was thinking," he said at last, "that if you should ever see me on the screen, as you're pretty sure to do, give me a nod, and for old times' sake whisper what you said to me just now. 'Good luck to you, Hugh, and God bless you always,' I'll be sure to hear you."

And then, with a brave attempt at his former princely manner, the hero of the moving-picture world made a grave and courteous bow and, squaring his broad, padded shoulders, strode from the room.

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ARCHIE SHELDON found his mother waiting for him in the sitting-room—just as he had found her waiting for him every afternoon since he had started to work as a clerk in the railroad offices four years before. It was the end of a hot day in early June, but after the warm air of the baked streets the darkened little sitting-room seemed very cool and fresh, and about the old chintz-covered furniture there was a distinct scent of lavender. As her son called to her from the hallway, Mrs. Sheldon rose quickly from her rocking-chair by the window and held out her arms to him. She put her soft white hands on his cheeks, and raising herself to her full height kissed him on his damp forehead. Even in the dim twilight she could see that he looked very tired and worried.

“What is it, Archie?” she asked. “Please tell your mother, won’t you?”

Sheldon put his arms about her and looked down at the smooth, pretty face and the wavy bronze hair.

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Only those who knew at what an absurdly young age Mrs. Sheldon had married could believe that she was the mother of a son of twenty-five.

"Sit down, won't you?" he said. "I think I will tell you. I've wanted to have a serious talk with you for a long, long time."

Mrs. Sheldon returned to the rocking-chair, and Archie drew up a foot-stool and sat at her feet.

"A party of the boys and girls in town," he began, "are going up to the mountains the last part of this month to camp out for a couple of weeks. The Slades are going along to chaperon them, and it just so happens that all of the crowd are friends of mine—that is, if I have any real friends. Well, I wasn't asked to go along, that's all."

Mrs. Sheldon looked out through the open window upon the gray shadows of the broad, elm-lined street, and then about the little room as if somewhere in the darkened corners or in the recesses of the heavy mahogany furniture she would find some adequate answer. "I'm sorry, so very sorry," was the only answer that she could find, and then she added; "It would have been a wonderful way to spend your vacation, wouldn't it? If I could——"

"It isn't exactly that, mother," Sheldon inter-

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rupted; "it's not just a question of my vacation. It's much more serious than that. After living in Dunham for over twenty years I have made no place here for myself. When I was a kid they called me 'mamma's boy,' and they've called me the same thing in one way or another ever since. I don't want to hurt you, because you know and I know that you're the best mother in the world, and I know how you've toiled and slaved for me all my life, but I've got to get away. I've got to fight it out for myself—alone. I'm going away from Dunham, mother, and when I come back I'll be a man, a real man. Don't you, won't you understand, dear?" Sheldon rose and slowly paced up and down the little room, looking straight ahead and with his hands clasped behind his back. For a few moments neither of them spoke, and then it was the low, even voice of the mother that broke the silence.

"Have you thought at all, Archie," she asked, "where you will go?"

Sheldon nodded. "I've thought of it a great deal, but it's very hard to decide just where I can go. I'd like to try New York—the game would be bigger there and the chances ought to be better, but I don't know where or how I could get a start. It seems

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strange that we don't know any one who would be willing to give me a chance. Most of the boys I know have some rich relatives or old family friends that can do something for them. Isn't there any one, mother?"

For a moment Mrs. Sheldon hesitated, and when she spoke it was with much apparent effort. "There is one old friend who lives in New York, and I imagine that he is very rich. I knew him after your father's death, when I was living in New York. It—it was before you were born, and I was very poor. Then we came to Dunham, and after that I heard he had been very successful. I haven't seen or heard from him for a long, long time now, but years ago he offered to do anything that he could for me."

The manner of the young man suddenly changed, and he sat forward on his chair and looked his mother eagerly in the eyes. "And you've never asked anything of him?"

Mrs. Sheldon shook her head. "No, Archie," she said, "never, and I don't suppose that I ever should, unless you wanted me to very much. I've always liked to be independent, and I was never much at asking favors even of old friends. But if this means

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such a great deal to you, and if it is your only chance, I will ask this man to make good his promise."

It was the private secretary of Thatcher Thole who led Archie Sheldon through the outer offices of the well-known financier and promoter. In a vague way Sheldon wondered at the extravagance of the big sunlit rooms and at the great number of smartly dressed young men busy at their desks and the many women stenographers pounding away at their typewriting machines. Thole's own room was the smallest of all and, save for the broad mahogany desk and a few chairs, was quite bare. "This is Mr. Sheldon," the secretary said, and went out, closing the door softly behind him. Thoroughly conscious of the importance of this first interview, Archie stood nervously twisting his hat between his hands and staring at the tall figure of the financier silhouetted against the brilliant sunlight of the open window.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Sheldon," Thole said, and leaving the recess of the window motioned Archie to a chair across the desk from his own. Sheldon sat down and glanced shyly at the man in whose hands his future lay. He saw the gaunt figure of a man

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in the early fifties, a smooth-shaven face, a strong chin and a bulging forehead, thin black hair, heavily streaked with white, and a hard straight mouth. The whole impression that he got in that first glance was one of unlimited determination and force, but neither in the steady gray eyes nor in the mouth was there any show of kindness whatever.

"I understand from a letter your mother wrote me," Thole began, "that you have had several years' experience in bookkeeping and general office work. As you probably know, that sort of thing leads to no more in New York than it does in your own town of Dunham. A good bookkeeper has no more opportunity or right to show his personality than a machine for making tacks has, and personality, I believe, is the biggest factor in a man's success in business. If it turns out that you haven't got the personality or the push that means success, then you can still go back to keeping books. In the meantime I'm going to turn you over to Slade, my secretary, and in helping him you will learn to make yourself useful to me and the various concerns in which I am interested. You will, in time—probably a very short time—learn a good many things of a confidential nature. Your value to me will depend

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very largely on your ability not to speak of these things, drunk or sober, not even to the one girl whom you are ass enough to believe deserves your entire confidence."

Sheldon blushed scarlet. "I don't drink, Mr. Thole," he protested, "and I have never cared much about girls."

The financier took a box of cigars from a drawer of his desk and pushed it toward Sheldon, but the latter shook his head.

"I never smoke," he said.

Thole lighted a cigar, stuck his hands deep into his trousers pockets, stretched his long legs before him, and under arched eyebrows stared steadily at the young man across the desk. "Viceless, eh? Well, I don't say you're wrong, and whatever else they may say about me I don't know that I was ever accused of putting temptation in the way of young men. But you will find out before long that the liquor in New York is better than the liquor at Dunham, that there is more of it, and that you will have greater opportunities and temptations to drink it. You will also find that the women of this town are often good looking, wear fine clothes, and frequently make inducements for young men to tell all

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they know — inducements which are extremely attractive and entirely unknown in country towns. As for smoking, it is a nerve tonic which I find harmless and often wonderfully beneficial. I smoke and I drink—that is, in moderation; and purely as recreation from mental worries I like women—women of all kinds. On the other hand, I know one of the biggest operators in New York who finds his recreation after a hard day's fight with the market in solitaire—'Idiot's Delight' is his especial game. I know another man. He's a director in several of my companies, and his particular insanity is to take a lot of iron clubs and knock a harmless rubber ball into a series of tin cups stuck in the ground. There is another big operator down-town who is crazy over unset gems. My particular 'Idiot's Delight' is women. I might as well tell you that now, because everybody else will tell you sooner or later, and they might tell it to you a little stronger than I do. But mind you, I play women only as my friends play golf or solitaire. Beyond occasionally giving them a tip that some friend has given me in strict confidence, I never mention business to them at all. They don't know anything about it in the first place, and in the second place, they all talk—all of them."

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So far the interview was not at all what Sheldon had expected, and when he looked up suddenly and his eyes met Thole's, his surprise and perplexity were very evident.

Thole's straight lips relaxed into something that resembled a smile. He sank farther back into his chair, put his feet on the edge of the desk, and with his hands clasped behind his head sat for some moments staring up at the ceiling.

"A little surprised, eh?" he said dryly. "Didn't expect me to be quite so confidential? Well, I'll be honest with you, Mr. Sheldon. I like your looks. I think we'll get on together. I believe you're going to be able to help me in one way or another. Besides—" He dropped his feet to the floor and looked evenly into the eyes of the young man across the desk. "Besides, I made a promise to your mother once, and I don't remember now that I ever broke a promise—certainly not to a woman.

"You'll find that there are a good many ways to live in New York, and you'll have to do your own choosing—pick out your own life and your own friends. But if you take my advice you'll always be a good mixer, and I'm pretty sure one way to get on in business is to trail with the boss—in, and

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especially out of, office-hours. Find out his weaknesses if he has any, and never leave him if you have to put him to bed. No sane man's going to give you the combination to his safe when the sun's shining. Night time is the time to ask and grant favors. Do you believe that these four naked walls would ever permit me to put my name on the note of the best friend I ever had? I don't."

With sudden confidence Archie Sheldon smiled at the grim face across the desk. "And yet, Mr. Thole, you are doing me a favor, a very great favor."

The financier nodded and twisted his cigar slowly between his lips. "Yes, in a way you're right, but when I promised to do this particular favor I was not surrounded by these four bare walls. So, you see, we both win."

The next day Sheldon started his labors under the watchful eye of Slade, the private secretary, a well-groomed young man, sometimes silent, sometimes loquacious when the situation demanded, and with a brain that seemed to Sheldon a perfectly appointed storehouse filled with an accurate knowledge of all men and of all their past deeds. Under this course of private instruction, the boy from Dunham grad-

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ually acquired a fairly thorough knowledge of the enterprises of his employer, and something, too, of the position that he held in the world of trade and finance. In a short space of time he ceased to look for the name of Thatcher Thole in the published lists of citizens who were prominent in the social life, or who stood behind the great public charities of the city, for he knew that he would not find it there; and yet, the farther his knowledge grew the more he appreciated how great was the power of this man and in how many different directions it extended. One afternoon on his way up-town in the subway he heard one of two men who sat opposite him mention his employer's name.

"Nice trick Thole turned to-day, eh? Must have cleaned up a small fortune. Charming crook."

"Wonderful," said the other man. "Always reminds me of a cartoon I saw in a newspaper once of a colossus sitting at the gates of Wall Street, shearing the lambs as they entered and casting them adrift quite naked and shivering with the cold. I never saw him, did you?"

The first man nodded. "Yes, often at the theatre and lobster restaurants. I went to a supper he gave in a private room once—it seems he was shy of

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guests, and some girl friend of his asked me. He's a big rangy cuss; sat at the head of the table looking like death at the feast. It was a good supper though, so I suppose that's all right."

"Sure, it's all right," the other man said, and they went on reading their newspapers.

When he was away from the office, the days and nights of Archie Sheldon were not unlike the first days and nights of most young men who come from small country towns to make their fortunes in the big market-place. He was quite conscious that all about him were many worlds of people, each leading its own life, and he was equally conscious that he had no part in any one of them. If there was a way to break into any of these closed circles of human beings whose interests seemed to be devoted to business, or society, or music, or charity, or the lighter pleasures of a great city, he had not yet discovered that way. Even the clerks and the women stenographers in the big rooms at the office down-town were forever whispering of their parties and dances, but he knew that he could not be part of their lives, even had he wished to be let in. He was shut up in Slade's little room, which connected directly with the private office of the great Thole himself, and there-

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fore he was held as one apart, a little superior to the rest of the force, and he knew that this was as his employer would have it and that he must acknowledge this responsibility and be thoroughly lonely in consequence.

Only once had he met any of Thole's employees away from the office. He had been at a vaudeville performance, and afterward had gone to the College Inn, partly because he was hungry, but principally for a glimpse of the gay life of which he had already heard much from the worldly-wise Slade. At a little table directly across the narrow room from his own, he was quite sure that he recognized one of the girls who worked in the outside office; but instead of the simple black dress in which he was accustomed to see her, she now wore a flaring pink hat with a great white plume and a lace waist cut low and decorated with a huge brooch of imitation diamonds. In answer to his smiling greeting she looked him steadily in the eyes, and then returned to her conversation with the young man who was with her. The next morning Sheldon, as was his custom, arrived at the office at least half an hour before Thole or Slade was expected to put in an appearance. No sooner was he at his desk than the girl came in and, having

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assured herself that he was alone, cautiously closed the door behind her.

"How are you?" Sheldon said. "I'm glad you recognize me this morning."

For a moment the girl hesitated at the doorway, and then crossed the room and with an air of much assurance sat on the edge of the desk. The simple cloth skirt she wore fitted her closely and showed every line of her well-rounded figure. She twisted her mouth into a smile of understanding and tossed her chin prettily in the air. "Caught me with the goods, eh?" she laughed. "I was flabbergasted when I saw you come in last night; I somehow never thought of you going to a place like the Inn. You won't tell the old man, will you?"

Sheldon shook his head. "Does that sort of thing amuse you?" he asked.

"Sure! Why not? If you hammered a typewriter all day I guess it would amuse you, too. But I'd get fired if Slade or the old man knew of it. It's too near their own game. I don't take a chance often on Broadway, but it's a lot better than the rink and the Circle restaurants. There's really not much risk, because I keep clear of Rector's and Churchill's and those swell joints where Thole hangs

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out. Gee, but I got a shock when you walked in on me! You won't tell though, will you?"

Again Archie shook his head.

"Bliged," she said, and with a smile of friendly confidence moved away from the desk. When she reached the door she turned to him. "A girl's got to have a good time once in a while," she said quite seriously, "after working a six-hour day, and especially after those twenty years of misspent youth I wasted with the folks in Poughkeepsie. I knew you were a sport and would understand. Bye-bye."

At one o'clock every day Sheldon lunched with Thole and Slade and any of the lambs whose wool seemed sufficiently fine and long enough for Thole to shear. In a body they all adjourned to a neighboring restaurant, and to the insidious strains of a Hungarian band Thole fattened the lambs with plenty of good food and wine preparatory to the slaughter. Even if it was his employer who paid the check at the end of every meal, Sheldon soon learned that he, in his own way, was expected to pay his share. He was always placed between two of the lambs, and, according to previous instructions received from the diplomatic Slade, it was his part to lead the conversation to, or perhaps away from,

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certain enterprises. Oftentimes Thole was not ready to launch his purpose so early as the luncheon-hour, and then the repast became a purely social occasion at which politics and the drama and the ladies of the theatrical profession were discussed in lighter vein. But even this favorite topic was not without a motive, for it always led to a suggestion on the part of the host that he would like to have his friends at dinner that night and go to a musical comedy afterward. Invariably at this point Thole's straight lips would waver into a smile, and he would blink his steel-gray eyes at the circle of lambs about the table and suggest somewhat diffidently that, if agreeable to all of the party, he would try to induce some of the ladies of the chorus to join them at supper, after the theatre. And the lambs, who usually came from adjacent cities, would accept the invitation with alacrity and express their particular delight at the prospect of having some of the ladies of the chorus with them at supper.

So far Archie Sheldon had never been asked to one of these parties, but he felt that he was gradually gaining the confidence of Thole, and that some day he would become a part of the old man's hours of relaxation just, for instance, as Slade had become.

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In the meantime there was little in his life beyond his work to interest or amuse him, and there were moments when he was greatly tempted to throw it all up and go back to the uneventful days and the quieter nights at Dunham. Every evening after supper, he wrote a letter to his mother. She always had been and still was the best part of his life, and the greatest pleasure of some new incident that happened during the day was that he could write to her about it at night. His fellow boarders at the house in which he lived on West Forty-fifth Street were a dull, soggy set of souls, who worked downtown during the day and in the evening sat about the boarding-house, the men collarless and the women in wrappers, and all reading the evening newspapers. Only the girl who lived in the little room at the end of his hallway interested him at all, and that was but the interest of pity, and the natural admiration a man has for any girl who is making a good fight. She was a pretty, very pale little thing with a great deal of soft brown hair and big brown eyes, a slightly turned-up nose, and a small mouth with cupid-bow lips. Ever since Sheldon had known her she had been suffering from a cold, and often the spells of coughing were so severe that she would leave the table

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and hurry to her room, and then the boarders would glance at each other dolefully, shake their heads in an ominous way, and return to their modest dinner. It was very late one night when the attacks of coughing had been particularly hard that Sheldon, unable to sleep, knocked at the girl's door and asked if he could be of some assistance. In reply, Violet Reinhardt—for that was the girl's name—opened the door and asked her visitor to come in. It was an absurdly small room, with a single window opening on a court. There were a bed, a bureau, and a washstand, a single chair, and a trunk with a label that read, "Baltimore Belles-Hotel." Even in the dim light of the single gas-jet Sheldon could see that the carpet was ragged and the wall-paper faded and soiled. There were no curtains at the window, no pictures on the walls, nor photographs on the bureau—the room was quite shocking in its naked poverty. With one hand the girl held her chintz wrapper together and with the other brushed back the mass of brown hair from her pale forehead.

"I hope I haven't kept you awake with my coughing," she apologized; "it's awful bad to-night. Won't you sit down?"

Sheldon sat on the chair and the girl opposite him

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on the bed among the mass of tousled sheets and blankets. She saw him glance at the label on the trunk and seemed to think that it deserved an explanation.

"I used to be with a burlesque troupe. Just like most kids in small towns I was crazy to go on the stage and ran away, but I couldn't go the one-night stands and the travel. Gee, but that's a tough game—those burlesque troupes—twice a day most of the time!"

"And now?" asked Sheldon.

The girl leaned her elbows on her knees and rested her chin between her palms. "Now," she sighed, "just now I'm posing. That's why my cold's so bad—the studio where I was working was awful cold—no fire and me posing for Cupid." The girl looked down at her bare ankles and the big gray woollen slippers she wore, and smiled grimly at the thought. It was the first time that Sheldon had seen her smile, and for the first time he saw that Miss Reinhardt had a certain piquant beauty, that kind of beauty that cannot well be denied.

"Does posing pay?" he asked.

The girl glanced about at the bare, cheerless room. "About eighteen a week, but the doctors 've been

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getting most of that. They don't even leave me enough to dress on decently." Her pale lips broke into a smile. "But, you see, you don't need many clothes when you pose for Cupid. I saw a dress to-day though in a window on Fifth Avenue. It was all lacy and had little gold threads in it, and there was a cape to match, and a big black hat went with it. Just for fun I went in and asked one of the salesladies what the whole outfit would cost, and she said she'd let me have it as a special favor for five hundred, and then we both looked at my torn coat and had a good laugh over it. Just the same, if I ever got that five hundred dollars' worth of rags on I'd make some of those show-girls sitting around Rector's sit up and take notice."

"Of course you would," Sheldon said, and moved toward the door. "There's nothing I can do for you?" he asked. "I mean nothing I can get you to help you to sleep?"

She smiled and shook the pretty mass of brown hair. "No, thank you," she said. "Obliged for your visit. Don't make yourself strange, now that we're acquainted. Good night."

As yet, all Sheldon knew of Thole and of the

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kind of life he led outside of business was the little he had learned from the private secretary and from the glimpses he had enjoyed on the infrequent occasions when he had wandered alone and as a stranger into the big supper-restaurants of Broadway. After the dull pleasures of Dunham, these glimpses of the white-light district had seemed bright enough to the young man, especially as no other social life seemed open to him, or ever would be open so long as he remained a trusted servant of his present employer. Even to the inexperienced eyes of Archie Sheldon the somewhat dubious position of Thole in the business and social worlds of New York was becoming very evident. On several occasions when he had carried confidential messages to some of the great men in the world of finance and had told them whence he came, he noticed that they regarded him with just a shade of curiosity and surprise; once on leaving a broker's private office, he had stopped for a moment outside, and through the open transom he had heard the voice of the broker saying to his secretary, "and such a nice, good-looking boy, too."

It was late in November, four months after his arrival in New York, when Sheldon was first asked

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to supper by his employer. Tired of spending his evenings at the boarding-house, he had gone to the theatre, and there from his seat in the orchestra he had seen Thole in a box with two women friends. Both of them were conspicuous on account of the low-cut gowns and big black picture hats they wore, and both, at least in the eyes of Sheldon, were superlatively beautiful. Thole, crouched in a wicker chair, sat in the back of the box occasionally glancing at the stage between the bare shoulders of his companions. After the first act was over the two men met in the lobby. Thole greeted the younger one cordially and offered him a cigarette, or to buy him a drink, both of which invitations Sheldon refused. After this, Thole seemed to hesitate for a few moments and then: "Why not come into my box and meet my friends? There's plenty of room, and we're going to my place afterward for a little supper."

Sheldon accepted the proposition with alacrity, and was led into the box and presented to the two ladies. When the performance began again he noticed that their entire interest seemed centered, not in the principals, but in the six show girls, with whom they frequently exchanged smiling glances. Every few

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minutes one of the two women, in an apparent effort to be civil to Sheldon, would turn to him and say with a forced enthusiasm, "Don't you think Maizie looks lovely in that pink frock?" or, "Isn't Eunice the prettiest show-girl in town?" And Sheldon would smile and say that he agreed thoroughly. Thole himself sat silent in the back of the box, and when the show-girls were not on the stage, the two women looked at the audience and were apparently thoroughly bored. When the performance was nearly over they arose in a most stately manner, gazed once more at the audience in a supercilious way, smiled again pleasantly at the show-girls nearest them on the stage, and then, led by Thole, and with a great rustling of their silken skirts, walked proudly out of the box. Sheldon followed in the wake of the party, not knowing whether to feel rather pleased or thoroughly embarrassed. Thole's car was waiting for them, and in a few minutes they were at his apartment overlooking the park on West Fifty-ninth Street. At the doorway Sheldon hesitated for a moment in wide-eyed wonder. The flames from the big wood fire and a light concealed by a great golden-colored globe filled the place with a dull orange glow, and threw fantastic

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shadows on the scarlet silk walls, the high tapestried and gilded chairs, the great white bearskin before the hearth, the soft deep Persian rugs, the cabinets filled with fragile, delicately colored glass, and the glistening mahogany side-boards loaded with massive pieces of silver. To more practised eyes it was an apartment in which great luxury and comfort were marred by a conspicuous lack of good taste, but to Sheldon it was all quite beautiful.

"It's like a glimpse of fairyland," he ventured to remark to Miss Fannie Brugiere. Miss Brugiere was very dark, with a lovely oval face and masses of black hair, which she wore in two great waves over her broad white forehead.

"It's good enough," she said indifferently; "quite comfy," and she shrugged her wonderful bare shoulders.

"Come in, Fannie, and help me," Thole called from the dining-room. "I sent the servants home, and we have got to look out for ourselves."

The other girl—Miss Lillian Lester—walked over to a high French window and pulling back the curtain beckoned Sheldon to join her. "Did you ever see the view from here?" she asked. "It's quite lovely."

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Through the little square window-panes they looked out on the starlit sky and the many lights of the taxicabs twinkling through the trees at the edge of the park. Of his new acquaintances Sheldon instinctively preferred Miss Lester. As if in studied contrast to the dark Junoesque Miss Brugiere she was very blonde, with a pink-and-white skin and round blue eyes which, with her scarlet lips, seemed to be always smiling in a most friendly fashion, and inviting one's confidence. For some moments they stood in the window, silently looking out at the vivid beauty of the night, and then it was the girl who spoke.

"You seem to be a great friend of Thole's. Why have I never met you before?"

"I don't know exactly," Sheldon said, a little confused. "I don't really know why he's never asked me before. I've known him only a few months."

"I see. You've not lived in New York long, have you?"

"No," Sheldon said. "How did you know that?"

Miss Lester smiled her sweet smile at him and tossed her dimpled chin in the air. "Oh, I don't know exactly. You're just different. I think we'd better join the others now."

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As his first glimpse of the gay life of New York it did not appeal to Sheldon as a very brilliant affair. The wit and sparkle seemed in no way commensurate with the wealth of the surroundings or the beauty of the women. No one except himself seemed the least interested in the many good things to eat, and the talk never rose above the level of the gossip of the stage and the men who openly courted its women. The host seldom spoke, ate nothing, but occasionally sipped a glass of champagne and smoked a long black cigar continually.

"Sort of dull, ain't it, Archie?" he said after a long silence. "I wish I'd ordered up some coon-shouters; they might have livened things up a little. But it ain't always as quiet as this."

Miss Brugiere cast a reproachful glance at Thole and Lillian Lester, as if to show that she was not without spirit had she wished to show it, and asked for another glass of champagne. "Don't you ever want to be quiet?" she complained. "I should think, Thole, that you'd get tired of rough-house parties sometimes."

"I don't care," he said, "I don't care, but I was sorry for Archie. It's the first time he's been out

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with me, and I sort of wanted him to have a good time."

"I'll turn a flip-flap," Miss Lester suggested, "or sing a song, or kick the Venetian globes out of that million-dollar chandelier overhead if you say so, but don't blame us because you haven't brought Mr. Sheldon out with you before. Goodness knows he's better than most of the kikes and rubes you travel with. Now if——"

"I had good reason," Thole interrupted, apparently wholly ignorant of Sheldon's presence, "good reason and plenty for not bringing him along. How'd I know he wouldn't break into another crowd? Broadway isn't New York."

Sheldon smiled pleasantly across the table at his host. "Why, Mr. Thole," he said, "you told me the first time I saw you that the way to get on was to trail with the boss, especially after office-hours. I'm trailing now, and I like it."

The two women laughed aloud, "How about it?" said Miss Lester.

Thole pulled at his cigar, blew a cloud of smoke across the white table-cloth, and watched it being sucked up by the pink candle-shades. "That's right," he said, "I told him that very thing, and I

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was sorry for it afterward. There was only one good piece of advice I could have given him, and I knew that he would pay no heed to that, so I told him the next best thing I knew."

Miss Lester reached across the table to a box of cigarettes, and taking one, slowly rolled it between her long white fingers. "That's most interesting," she said. "What would be your real advice to a young man starting in New York?"

Thole looked at the girl and smiled grimly into the big blue eyes. "I'd tell him to go home."

Lillian Lester shook her fluffy yellow hair and laughed aloud. "That *is* funny," she said.

"Was it funny last summer," Thole asked, "when you came to me and begged me for the money to send you back to Middleboro, where you said they knew you as Maggie Somebody, and had never heard of you as Lillian Lester? I loaned you that money just because you told me you wanted to get back for a month with the boys and girls you knew when you were a kid. Am I right or am I wrong? I know. I went back myself once, but I was the regular thing, for I was well heeled. I played the whole four acts—bought the old place, put in enamel bath-tubs, and

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turned the stable into a garage big enough for six cars."

Miss Lester leaned her elbows on the table and rested her chin between her palms. "Well?" she asked.

"Well, I didn't find it—the peace and quiet I'd been looking forward to and working for for thirty years. It wasn't there, all right—that is, it wasn't there for me. They'd taken my love for that away from me, but they'd put something else there in its place; they'd just plain poisoned my whole system. I'd been going too hard and too fast for thirty years to slow down, and so I hurried back. I suppose I was afraid I'd miss something. But do you think that there is anything in this big town that can take the place of the peace and content of that farm? I don't. I tell you this town poisons you. Some of us live through it, and some of us don't, but we all die with it in our systems. And the worst of it is that it isn't confined to New York—this town ought to be segregated, but you can't segregate it. It's the fountain-head for the rotten books and the filthy plays and the stories of the gay life of the Great White Way, as they call it, and the romances of fortunes made overnight on the stock-market; and

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the rotten plays and the tales of Broadway and Wall Street are sent scurrying over the country like bad blood chasing through the veins of some great fine brute of an animal. It's an octopus, I tell you, an octopus, and its dirty tentacles stretch to every village in America."

Lillian Lester smiled across the table at Thole and shook her pretty blond curls. "It misses some towns all right, all right. If you'd spent the summer with me at Middleboro you'd believe me. There's no New York blood has reached that burg yet."

"No?" said Thole. "How about that young sister of yours you brought back with you? Didn't she tell me herself the other night at Rector's that she had been a stenographer in a bank at home, and lived with her family, and was contented enough till she got a peep at your pretty dresses and your fine underclothes? She told me how they used to dry your things in the kitchen so the neighbors wouldn't know. I guess New York got to her one way or another all right, even if she did live in Middleboro."

During the last few words Miss Lester's pink pretty face went quite white, but she kept her lips hard pressed and gazed blankly across the table into the big bovine eyes of Miss Brugiere.

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"And how is it with you, Fannie?" Thole asked. "I'll bet you came from some little town, brought here by some fairy tales of the great city, eh? Am I right or am I wrong?"

"Not so little—Kansas City."

Thole nodded. "Well, even if I missed that guess I'll bet your folks were quiet, respectable, law-abiding citizens."

The girl leaned over the table and looked Thole evenly in the eyes. "You can cut out my people from this talk. They've got no more to do with you and your kind than they have with me."

Miss Brugiere sank back in her chair and daubed her tear-stained eyes with an exquisitely small lace handkerchief.

"I'm sorry," said Thole, "but that's the answer."

"Well, there's one thing certain," Sheldon laughed, "this New York poison never got as far as Dunham. At least if it did I never knew of it."

Thole's teeth closed hard on his cigar, and for a moment he sat silent, his eyes blinking at the pink candle-shades. Then: "That's good, Archie. I hope you never may."

Miss Brugiere stirred uneasily and with a stifled yawn rose from the table. "I'm tired of hearing

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you rave, Thole," she said, smiling. "Who's going to take me home?"

Thole pulled himself slowly to his feet. "The car is waiting for you down-stairs. Sheldon can take you both home. I'm sorry, Archie," he added, stretching his long arms above his head, "but I'm tired, dead beat."

The women went into the bedroom to put on their wraps, and for the moment the two men were left alone. Sheldon was standing before the fireplace, and Thole walked over to him and laid his hand gently on the younger man's shoulder. In the dim light of the burning logs he looked into Sheldon's eyes.

"You're wonderfully like your mother sometimes," he said, "wonderfully like." For a moment he hesitated, as if uncertain as to just how to express himself further. He tossed his half-smoked cigar into the grate, and with the tip of his tongue moistened his dry lips. "I'm sorry," he said at last, "I'm very sorry about to-night."

"Sorry?" Sheldon repeated. "Why, I've had a grand time. I enjoyed every minute of it."

Thole nodded. "I'm glad of that. It seemed to me to be pretty dull, and then—well, I'd always

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hoped that you might take up with a different crowd. Of course these girls—" He hesitated for a moment, and before the sentence was finished the women had returned.

Sheldon and Lillian Lester left Miss Brugiere at her apartment and then started on the last stage of their journey to Miss Lester's home, which was far over on the West Side. As they turned from the avenue into the broad deserted plaza at the entrance to the park, Miss Lester settled back into the deep cushions, and as if from sheer weariness closed her eyes. The big car purred on its way over the smooth frosted roadways, and the very speed at which they flew by the long rows of leafless trees warned Sheldon that his first night of happiness in New York was fast nearing an end. For some time there was silence, and then he turned to his companion. Her chin was sunk deep in the collar of her long fur coat, her eyes were still closed, but about her lips there was the same friendly smile that had first attracted him to her and added so much to the real beauty of the girl.

"I'm afraid you're very tired," he said. "It must have been an awful bore to you, sitting about all night with Thole and me."

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Miss Lester shook her pretty head and opened her eyes as if in wonder at the thought. "A bore?" she repeated softly. "I don't know when I've been much happier than I was to-night. I loved it."

Sheldon looked eagerly into the now wide-open eyes. "Why?" he asked, "why?"

Again the eyes closed, and quickly putting out her gloved hand she touched the sleeve of his coat and as quickly drew it back again. "I guess it must have been you," she whispered. "You see, you're so different from the rest. I knew that I was going to like you the minute you came into the box."

The big car swung sharply from the dark roadway into the broad, brilliantly lighted street, and Miss Lester slowly pulled herself out of the comfort of the deep cushions and sat up very erect on the edge of the seat.

"We're almost there," she sighed. "It seems only a few moments since we left Fannie's."

"Then it's good night," he said, "and you are going to let me see you very soon again, and we are going to be great friends, aren't we?"

She put out her hand, and for a few moments it rested in both of his, while for the first time he saw

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the smile leave her lips and a new and very serious look come into the blue eyes.

"It's up to you," she said simply. "That's just how it is—it's all up to you."

Uneventful as the night of his first supper-party may have been to the others, it was marked by the second mile-stone in the life of young Sheldon. The next morning Thole called him into his office and told him that, owing to his close attention to business, he had decided to raise his salary, and the increase was of considerable proportions. A few days later, as a further reward for his faithful services, Thole announced that he had opened a joint account on behalf of himself and Sheldon and that the stock in which he had invested should show a quick and substantial profit. With this turn in Archie's financial condition there came many other changes. He moved from the boarding-house on Forty-fifth Street to a small apartment in a more modish neighborhood and went to a good tailor, who made him clothes suitable to his new social responsibilities. For advice in these and similar matters he turned to Slade, whose knowledge of such affairs, at least to Archie, seemed unlimited. Almost

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every night now he dined with Thole and was a welcome guest at his numerous supper-parties. Some nights they dined alone, at other times Slade was with them, and often Thole had as his guests the out-of-town lambs who were ready to be robbed of their golden fleece. In Thole's manner of winning these men over as investors in his enterprises there was much that Sheldon resented. He knew that many of these ventures could result in profit to his employer only, but the worldly-wise Slade had assured him over and over again that Thole's methods were the modern methods of business and practised by all successful promoters and financiers. It was only at the hour before dinner when Sheldon wrote his daily letter to Dunham that he ever questioned the moral side of the day's work. The changes that had come so rapidly into his life seemed to leave him little of which he could write to his mother, but for this he comforted himself with the thought that she was of another generation and was quite incapable of understanding the kind of life that stood for modern success. Further to moderate his feelings of distrust in himself and his new life was his real admiration for the tremendous force and the subtle craftiness of the man who now controlled him, because, despised

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as he may have been, Thole's daring had made him a giant in a city where the power of money is the goal of so many men. The door to the particular society in which Thole moved once opened to him, Sheldon found the rest easy enough. The language of the men, which never extended beyond the stock-market and the gossip of Broadway, was not difficult to speak, and the women, however dull they might be, were always affable. Indeed, the young man from the country, with his good looks and frank manner and his clean, fresh point of view, was universally regarded as a most welcome change from the average bored New-Yorker, and in consequence Archie was received by the ladies of Thole's world with flattering favor.

"I wonder," said Miss Fannie Brugiere on the occasion of a supper-party at which Sheldon was not present, "I really wonder what makes that young man so extremely popular with our set?"

"I know," suggested Lillian Lester. "It's because he hasn't taken that New York poison that worries Thole such a lot, and, incidentally, he treats every chorus girl as if she were a duchess."

Miss Brugiere smiled at her friend across the table, and shook her head. "You might be right, at

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that, Lillian," she said, "but at what particular part of your career did you learn how duchesses were treated?"

"Duchesses!" exclaimed Miss Lester. "Didn't I play one of the six duchesses in 'The Earl and the Girl'? Sure I know how the Johnnies treat duchesses."

"No, you didn't," Miss Brugiere replied, with some little show of annoyance. "I was one of the duchesses; you were in the other set of show-girls."

"That's right," Miss Lester agreed. "I remember now; I *was* to be a duchess, and then Julian took me out of it and put me in the big number—what did they call it?—'The March of the Cocottes'—I knew I'd learned swell manners somewhere." And then the conversation, which was never devoted to any one topic for any great length of time, changed to detailed descriptions of what the ladies were to wear at the opening of the Café de l'Opera.

It was a very busy life that Sheldon enjoyed now, filled during the day with new business schemes and at night with many new faces. For a time it amused him greatly, and he was keenly conscious of the delight and pleasure that this constant excitement and change afforded him. And then, as he gradually

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became a fixed spoke in this particular social wheel of New York, the purely physical excitement gradually faded away, and the former pleasures developed into a necessary routine, the value of which only occurred to him when short business trips took him away from town and deprived him of it. Thoughts of Dunham and the mother who had once meant everything to him occupied his mind but little now, and his letter home was no longer included in the day's routine. For a period of time these omissions caused him moments of sincere regret, but such moments became more and more infrequent and besides this he no longer seemed capable of knowing regret or pleasure or any other feeling with the same depth that he had formerly known it.

The four months that he had spent at the boarding-house when he had first come to New York had been long forgotten in the pleasant warmth of his present comfort. It was a chance meeting with Violet Reinhardt late one January afternoon in Times Square that with a sudden shock recalled him to those unhappy days. It was bitterly cold, and he noticed that the short coat the girl wore was very thin and frayed, and her bare hands and bloodless lips looked half frozen from the sharp wind that

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blew great clouds of fine dry snow across the open square.

In his haste to get out of the storm he did not recognize her, but the little figure stopped before him, and hesitatingly the girl put out her hand. He took it in both of his and pressed it with a real warmth of feeling at which even he himself wondered.

"Hello!" he cried. "I *am* glad to see you again. How are you?"

She looked up at him and smiled as cheerfully as she could. "Oh, I'm all right, I guess."

He still held her right hand, but with her left she reached up and brushed the snow from the fur collar of his overcoat. "No use in asking you how you are," she said, "you with your sable furs. Things must have broken pretty good for you since you quit the boarding-house."

"Oh, pretty well, thank you," he laughed. "Come in to Rector's and tell me all about yourself and the folks at the boarding-house. It's only a step."

She glanced down at her worn coat and short ragged skirt. "I'm not fit," she said.

Sheldon tucked her hand under his arm and led her reluctantly toward the restaurant. It was just

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past five o'clock, and the big brilliantly lighted room was almost deserted. The little groups of idle, black-coated waiters turned to look in wonder at Archie Sheldon's new girl friend. In the glare of her present surroundings she looked like a waif rescued from the streets. They sat at a little side table and, with a funny grimace, Violet began to warm her half-frozen fingers under the rose-colored lampshade.

"Do you like anything better than champagne?" he said.

"Sure not, but you certainly must have struck it rich to be buying Tiffany water at five in the afternoon. There's some class to our ex-boarder, eh, what?"

Sheldon smiled at the smiling face across the table. The warmth of the room was gradually bringing the color back to her cheeks, and her big eyes were fairly glistening with excitement.

"This is a very unusual event," he explained solemnly; "it's a reunion. Now tell me all about yourself."

"It's just the same—still posing."

"And the cough?"

The girl shook her head, and the sparkle suddenly

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faded out of her eyes. "I know an artist who is pretty strong with a specialist, and the doc promised to give me his honest opinion for nothing. It was honest, all right. He sentenced me to the Adirondacks for a whole year."

"Well," Archie asked, "what are you going to do about it?"

"What am I going to do about it? He might as well have recommended an automobile trip to California or a cruise in a yacht to Monte Carlo. The cheapest he said I could live up there would be ten dollars a week, and where can I get the five hundred? Besides, I'd hate to be away from the big town a whole year."

"Don't be foolish," Sheldon urged; "it might mean the saving of your life."

The girl shrugged her shoulders, and with one nervous gulp emptied her glass of champagne. "I don't want to save my life," she said, "if it means living in the Adirondacks. Gee, it would be lonely up there and everybody sick about you! I want to stay where people are jolly, and where it's warm like it is in here." She looked up and smiled with understanding. "Yes, even if I have to see it from the streets."

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"But in a year you could come back to this—if this is what you want so much. You'd be well then and able to enjoy it."

Sheldon had somehow come to feel that the chance meeting of this afternoon had put the responsibility of the girl's future in his hands. Five hundred dollars seemed such a paltry sum to stand between death and a human life.

"Suppose," he said, "that I could get you the money?"

She looked up at him with wide-eyed wonder. "I've known men to offer big money to women to stay in New York but never to leave it. Don't talk foolish. Why should you give me five hundred? That's enough about me—tell me some of the scandal. You seem to know the head waiter, and look as if you were in our set."

For a long time they sat there talking the gossip of the stage and of her life in the studios and at the boarding-house, and then the people began to arrive for dinner, and the gorgeous clothes of some of the women seemed to bring Violet to the sudden decision that her hour of gaiety was at an end. Sheldon put her in a taxicab, gave the chauffeur the address, and then, as he said good-by, pressed a yellow bill into

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the girl's hand. "Pay the driver with that," he said, "and good luck to you."

She glanced at the bill and waved her hand to him from the open window. "Thank you," she cried, "and good luck to you. That was some party."

The next morning Sheldon went to Thole and told him that he was in immediate need of at least five hundred dollars, and that he would like to close out their joint account, which already showed a profit to his credit much greater than the sum needed. Late that afternoon he sent the money with a carefully worded little note to Miss Reinhardt, and then he went to his rooms and for a long time sat smoking before the open fire. There was a great warmth of feeling that filled his whole mind and his body, the glow of happiness and contentment that comes after a day well spent—a happiness that he had not known since he first came to New York. In his own way God had put it within his power to save one of God's own sparrows, and the religion which his mother had taught him came back to him with a great force, and he was very grateful for the chance that had come to him to do good. In the thrill of the moment he decided that he would go on doing good deeds, especially to "the least of these," and then he re-

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remembered what Thole had said of New York and how he had called it an octopus. At the thought of how very wrong the old man was Sheldon smiled indulgently and, as if in denial of Thole's cynical words, slowly shook his head at the crackling logs in the fireplace.

The next day he returned to the office with the same warmth of feeling in his heart and the same determination to do better things—things of which he could write to his mother at Dunham. That night he dined at Martin's with Thole and Slade and several of their business friends, and although Sheldon was generally the brightest member of these somewhat sombre dinner-parties, both Thole and his secretary noticed that on this occasion he seemed particularly happy and unusually entertaining to the other guests. The dinner was half over when Slade, who sat facing the vestibule, smiled at the men at the table. "Here comes something new," he whispered, "and very beautiful. She looks like the Follies of 1920."

Sheldon turned with the others, and saw Violet Reinhardt and a man just entering the door to the dining-room. Her small beautiful figure showed clearly through a filmy black dress with golden

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threads running through it; over her shoulders she wore a rose-colored cape, and the masses of soft brown hair were half concealed by a broad black hat. The pretty little face was more white than even its natural paleness, but the cupid's-bow lips were scarlet now, and the contrast was at least wonderfully effective. As she approached Thole's table she smiled at Sheldon, and then as she passed, with much bravado, made a little grimace at him. The other men at the table laughed and made some good-natured remarks about his beautiful young friend, but Sheldon was looking at the little figure sweeping down the aisle between the rows of white tables and apparently did not hear them. For some time afterward he sat silent, his fellow guests believing, according to their Broadway logic, that being very young he was probably a little jealous of the other man. As a matter of fact, he was wondering how one of God's sparrows, just for the delight of putting on gay plumage and for the happiness of a few days of warmth and ease, and for a few days of a certain kind of pleasure, could sacrifice a whole life; and once more, but in quite a different spirit from the last time, he remembered Thole's words about the octopus.

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From the gradual breaking up of his faith there still remained to Archie Sheldon an unshaken belief in two people—his mother and Thatcher Thole—and it rose from the wreckage like the two splendid spars of a stranded ship. Whatever might be said of the personal life and questionable business methods of Thole, he had been to him, at least, all that a man could ask or hope for from his best friend. As for his mother, the broader life and the many, many people he had met of late only served to prove how wonderful a woman she really was. For the first time he began to appreciate the unselfishness of her love—how she had toiled and suffered to make his life happy, and he determined that some day, just as soon as he could spare the time, he would return to her and tell her how he had come to understand, and of the great depths of his gratitude.

For Fannie Brugiere and Lillian Lester and their women friends, he tried to find their excuse in the narrow, cramped life of the small towns from which they came. Had he, too, not left his home in the hope of finding a broader life? All could not succeed as he had succeeded, and even they had their own code of morals and, for the most part, lived up to them. In her own way Lillian Lester had tried

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very hard to be a friend to him. In his ignorance of affairs he had often turned to her, and her advice had always proved sane and wise, as that of the woman who has learned her knowledge by experience is fairly sure to be. From the first night that he had met her, he had in a way set her apart from the others. Her friendship had often been of inestimable value to him, and sometimes he stopped to wonder just how long such a friendship could remain only a friendship. When business called him out of town it was only to Lillian Lester that he wrote amusing letters of his adventures. It was Lillian Lester to whom he always wired asking her to dine with him on the night of his return, and, even with his conspicuous lack of vanity, he could not ignore the fact that the girl would break any previous engagement to accept these invitations. Down in his heart he was sure that she cared for him, just as he was sure that he cared for her; and he was sorry, because he knew that when love comes in at the door, especially the door of the particular world in which they both lived, then friendship is pretty sure to fly out at the window. With all the unconventionality of the lives of the people about him, Sheldon had been true to certain standards, and he wanted to remain

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true to them. In any case, he was sure that if he was to sink to the moral level of his friends he did not want it to be through the only one of them all for whom he really cared.

It was late one afternoon when Miss Lester had dropped in at his apartment, as she did very often now, for a half-hour's chat and a cup of tea. Outside it was snowing and was bitterly cold, and Sheldon was very grateful and touched that she had cared enough to see him to leave her own pleasant fireside to come to his. The frosty air had given her pale cheeks an unusual color, her eyes were shining, and never before had her flower-like beauty seemed so exquisite to him as it did now. With a warmth of feeling he had never shown before he put out his arms to her, and uttering a little cry of pleasure she ran toward him. At last her day of victory was at hand. But she had not counted on the puritanical teaching that still held him in its iron grip, for instead of putting his arms about her, he suddenly remembered himself, and gently laying his hands on her shoulders, kissed her on her cold forehead. With a little grimace she turned from him and, refusing his help, threw off her heavy coat and dropped into a low chair before the open fire.

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"I'm done," she said; "you're hopeless. I put on the very best clothes I've got in the world, come all the way downtown to see you, look just as pretty as I know how, and the best I get is the kind of kiss you would give your great-grandmother. I'm just plain discouraged. Is there anything that will melt you?"

"Nothing will if you won't," he said. "The water in the kettle is boiling. You'd better make the tea."

Lillian pulled herself out of the chair, shrugged her shoulders, and crossed the room to the tea-table.

"I'm sorry," he begged, "I'm very sorry, especially to-day. You mayn't believe me, but I was never so glad to see any one. I knew I was to see you to-night at Thole's supper, and so I was afraid you wouldn't come this afternoon."

"Don't mention Thole to me," she said abruptly. "I'm tired of him, and his supper-parties. Can't you talk about our own troubles just for once?"

It had long been in her mind to say what she thought of Thole, but she had chosen the wrong moment, and Sheldon came quickly to the defense of his employer.

"Whatever he may have been to others," he said hotly, "he has been mighty good to you and me."

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Miss Lester slowly joined the tips of her long white fingers and looked steadily across the table into Sheldon's excited eyes. "Yes and no, Archie," she said in her low, soft voice. "I amuse him, and you are of great service to him. There are better things for a woman than to have her name mixed up with Thatcher Thole, and many better things for a man than to be known as 'Thole's fixer.' Now don't get excited. I'm only telling you this for your own good. Thole is no saint."

Sheldon nervously lighted a cigarette and going over to the fireplace stood looking at the calm, lovely features of Miss Lester. When he spoke it was with much spirit. "I know he's no saint, nobody knows it better, but he's taken pretty good care of me. I owe him a lot more than I can ever pay."

Miss Lester smiled and shook her pretty blond curls. "I wouldn't let that bother me," she said. "If the crowd that runs after Thole were the best crowd in New York it would be different, but it isn't. It's about the worst crowd outside of jail in the city. You are the only gentleman, if I may use the expression, on his entire staff. You can do more with his clients than all the others put together. All the men say that, and I know that half the women who go

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to his parties would stay away if they didn't know that you would be there. Fannie Brugiere is the only girl I know who really likes Thole—at least I like to think she does. The trouble with you is that you don't know who's who in New York. You began with Thole, and he's never let you get away. The other men I know, for instance, and to whose parties I go, are gentlemen. I can't introduce you to them, because that wouldn't do you any more good than it helps you to be known as a friend of Thole. Do you think these men would go to one of his suppers? They play with the same women he does, but you bet they don't know his men friends. There's some class to these chaps, they belong to decent clubs, and——”.

Sheldon suddenly tossed his cigarette into the hearth. “That'll do, Lillie,” he said, and there was a certain finality in his tone that made the girl flush and rise quickly to her feet.

“It was for your own good, Archie.”

He put her coat on, wrapped her fur collar about her throat, and led the way to the elevator. “Good-by,” he said. “I know you told me for my own good, but just the same it hurts. He's been like a father to me.”

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She held out her hand to him. "Forgive me. Let's be friends again."

"Sure, we're the best of friends. Notwithstanding all you have just said, I suppose I'll meet you at Thole's party to-night. You know we are to dine at Martin's at seven thirty sharp."

"You bet I will—rath-er," she laughed. "I hear the supper is going to be a wonder even for Thole—music and vaudeville stunts and all kinds of added features. Here's the elevator—*au revoir* till seven thirty."

This party of Thole's had been the talk of the particular set in which he moved for many days. It so happened that two musical comedies were to have their New York opening on the same night, and the supper was given in honor of the best known of the show-girls from both companies. It promised in all ways to be a beauty contest of unusual proportions, and for a fortnight Thole, as well as Slade and Sheldon, had been doing everything which unlimited money, with the aid of their past experience, could do to make the party worthy of the occasion. That none of the guests happened to have speaking parts in either of the new productions was of little con-

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sequence. A success meant that they would remain in town indefinitely, and that was much more important in the eyes of these young women than all the laurel wreaths ever placed on the brow of a great dramatic artist.

It had been arranged that Fannie Brugiere and Lillian Lester were to dine with Thole and Sheldon and Slade, and afterward to divide the evening between the two new productions. But while the party was waiting for Thole at the restaurant, he telephoned that he had to go up-town on an unexpected mission and would meet them later at the theatre or at his rooms before the supper-party. These four, having dined and seen the first act of one musical comedy and the second act of the other, hurried to Thole's apartment to be sure that all was in readiness for the supper. The walls of the library and the dining-room had been draped from the ceiling to the floor with smilax, and through these dark-green curtains of foliage, filling the room with their faint fragrance, many little incandescent lights twinkled like silver stars. Fannie Brugiere and Slade were in the dining-room still discussing some of the minor points of the supper with the butler, and Archie and Lillian Lester were sitting before the fire in the study wait-

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ing for Thole. It was nearly time for the other guests to arrive when he hurried in.

"I'm sorry to be so late," he explained quickly, "but I've been having a long rotten evening of it, I can tell you."

A servant took his overcoat, and he came over to the fire and stood with his back to the open hearth.

Miss Lester, from her low deep chair, smiled up at his drawn features and worried eyes. "You must have had a bad night of it. You're a sight, Thole, but I must say that your rooms are quite lovely. They're just like the fairy grotto in a pantomime or a florist's shop-window around Easter."

Thole looked down at the girl, but his eyes showed that he was quite unconscious of what she was saying to him. Then he turned to Sheldon, and moistened his dry lips and laced his fingers nervously behind his back. "Archie," he began. "I'm in a mess."

Miss Lester yawned, and stirred uneasily in her chair. "Shall I go out?" she asked.

Thole continued to look at Sheldon. "Do as you want," he said sharply, and by way of reply Miss Lester sank further into the chair and daintily rested her yellow satin slippers on the fender.

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"I'm in a devil of a mess," Thole went on, "and, Archie, you've got to get me out of it."

Sheldon nodded and smiled. "I'd be only too glad," he said.

"Do you remember a Mrs. Steele, who dined with us one night at Delmonico's?"

"Perfectly—she was quite beautiful."

"Well," Thole continued, "she used to live over on Riverside Drive, but just now she has an apartment at the Marie Antoinette. I've seen a good deal of her lately, and I like her well enough—in fact, in a way she's very necessary to me just now—and for some inane reason she's taken a notion to me."

Miss Lester laughed aloud. "Don't fool yourself, Thole. It's your money."

Thole shook his tall lanky frame, as if to show his indifference to the girl's words, and hurried on. "I went up to her place last night to take her to dinner, and as usual she kept me waiting. I had some legal papers to read, so I went to her desk and looked them over, and then did a little calculating. Then she came in suddenly, and in my hurry I picked up the business papers, but forgot a couple of personal letters I'd left lying on her desk. One of these letters was from Fannie. She wrote it several days ago,

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and she was sore at the time and accused me of a lot of things I never did, and to make matters worse she had to get affectionate toward the last. It seems that the maid found the letter, and was so delighted with it that this morning she showed it to Mrs. Steele. Fortunately there was no envelope, and the letter began with just 'Dearest' or 'Darling' or some foolish word, so there was no way of proving the letter was meant for me. I had to do something quickly, and the only thing I could think of was to tell her that it was written to you and that, being a young man without much experience, you had brought it to me for advice, and that I had taken it along to consider. I don't know whether she really believed me or not, but you've got to go up there to-morrow morning and square me. I said you'd be up about eleven o'clock."

Sheldon, his lips closed tight, stared into the fire. "Just what was in the letter?" he asked at last.

"Oh, I don't know," and then as the thought first came to Thole that Archie was hesitating in his assent to do his bidding, he looked evenly into the young man's eyes. "I don't know," he repeated, "and furthermore I don't care. You will go to the Marie Antoinette to-morrow at eleven, and you will

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swear that that letter was intended for you, and if it's necessary you will stand for everything of which Fannie accused me. Now I hope you have that straight. I probably won't have a chance to speak to you about it again to-night. I'm going now to see about the supper. Don't forget—eleven to-morrow morning.”

For a few moments Sheldon and Miss Lester sat silently looking at the crackling logs, and then the girl pulled herself up to the edge of the chair and rested her chin between her palms.

“You aren't thinking of standing for that, are you?” she asked. “I saw Fannie the day she wrote that note, and what she said to Thole was probably something fierce. Why should you be the goat?”

Sheldon flushed scarlet, and looked up at the pretty pink-and-white face and the flashing eyes. “Why should I be the goat?” he repeated. “Because—you know as well as I do. Thole isn't the man to be denied anything—he'd fire me.”

“Well,” the girl said quickly, “suppose he does? Then you can start again with a decent firm, even if you don't make the money that Thole gives you. It would be worth a lot for you to work with white people instead of crooks like him and his shadow

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Slade. Promise me you'll refuse to do this dirty trick for him. Won't you please promise me, Archie? Be a man!"

She held out her hand, and he took it and pressed it closely in his own. "I don't know, Lillie, I don't know yet. It means so very much to me, but I'm beginning to understand. Perhaps you're right; thank you anyhow."

From midnight until five o'clock the next morning the supper ran its riotous course. A few of the guests had retreated in pairs to the study for more intimate tête-à-têtes, the vaudeville performers had concluded their "turns," and the members of the band had long since slipped away unnoticed. The shaded candles of the candelabra in the dining-room had died a spluttering death, and some one in a spirit of elation had turned on the electric lights. Through the orange globes the dull lights from the ceiling burned their way through the hot, smoke-laden air down to the remaining guests lounging about the table. They showed the white necks and shoulders and the filmy dresses of the women, the long table—a confused litter of tall Venetian glasses, half-filled champagne bottles, women's long white gloves tied

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into knots, and everywhere over the white cloth, bunches of crushed and withering flowers. At the head of the table sat Thole, the butt of a cigar gripped between his teeth and his clear eyes and pale putty-colored skin a marked contrast to the flushed faces of the men and women about him.

As the clock struck five, Fannie Brugiere, who sat at his right, got up, and the rest of the guests accepted her action as a signal that the party was at an end. They all rose at the same time, and Thole had already started with Fannie Brugiere toward the door of the study when he half turned to Archie. "Don't forget," he said, "that you're to be at the Marie Antoinette at eleven."

There was something in Sheldon's look that made Thole stop. "You understand that, don't you?" he added.

For a moment Sheldon looked him evenly in the eyes. Then, speaking very deliberately, "I find, Mr. Thole, that I can't keep that engagement. It is quite impossible, quite."

Thole turned and, walking back to the table, stood with his hands resting on the back of his chair. "I don't think I quite understand you. Do you mean that you won't go?" The old man's voice was very

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low, but it had a metallic ring that carried to the far corners of the big room, and his guests, who had started to leave, stopped suddenly and stared in wide-eyed wonder. Archie was conscious that Lillian Lester had moved very close to his side, and he felt her long soft fingers close tightly over his hand, which was resting on the edge of the table. Through the smoky air he could see Thole's eyes burning with anger, and then he saw Fannie Brugiere walk toward Thole and put her arm about his shoulder as if to protect him. .

Sheldon pulled himself up very straight and, with a futile effort to smile, glanced at the scared, silent faces about the room, and then he turned back to Thole. "I mean," he said, and his voice sounded to him as if some one else were talking a long way off, "I mean that I can't do what you ask. I mean that I am done with you, Mr. Thole, you and your dirty work forever."

Thole's face went quite white, and his long bony fingers clutched at the back of the chair. "You cub!" he whispered. "You cur!"

With her hand still on Thole's shoulder, Fannie Brugiere uttered a half-stifled sob and then suddenly leaned far over the table toward Sheldon. "You,"

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she cried hysterically, "*you* refuse anything he asks you to do? Why, *you* can't refuse."

Sheldon shifted his eyes from Thole to those of the woman. "Why?" he asked. "Why can't *I* refuse?"

"Why? Why, because he's your father."

As the words left her lips Thole swung about on her. "How dare you say that?" he whispered. "How dare you?"

For a moment she stepped away from him in apparent fear, but her courage returned to her as quickly as it had gone. "Why not?" she shouted. "Why shouldn't he know what everybody on Broadway has known for months? Is he so much better than the rest of us?"

Her voice kept on ringing in his ears for a long time, and then it seemed to Sheldon that the room had become suddenly quite silent, and when he opened his eyes again he found that he was still standing in the same place with his finger-tips resting on the edge of the table. There was no one with him now except Lillian Lester, who was standing in the doorway. Through the gray-blue tobacco smoke he recognized her by her yellow dress, and then as everything became clearer to him he saw her white shoulders and

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bare arms and her pretty fluffy golden hair and her blue eyes, which were wet with tears. He saw her lips move as if she were trying to say something, but no words reached him; nothing but a woman's sob, and then with her head bowed she went out the door, and left him alone. He reached out his hand and, picking up a glass filled with champagne, held it to his lips until he had drunk it all. After that his mind became quite clear again; he remembered everything that had happened and just how it had happened, and he threw back his shoulders and started to move slowly toward the door which led to the study. He knew that he would find Thole waiting for him, and that they would be alone.

Thole was standing before the fireplace, the long, lanky figure in black an absurd contrast to the walls of delicate, fragrant smilax and the fragile roses which surrounded him on every side. Sheldon glanced at him, and then crossed the room to one of the high French windows that looked out on the deserted park. His brain was absolutely clear now, and he was surprised to find that he felt no anger for Thole, not even a mild animus, nothing but contempt and a certain kind of pity for the man who had so recently controlled him body and soul. The tragedy of the

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last few minutes had reversed their positions; it was he who was the master now.

Thole it was who broke the long silence. "Well," he asked querulously, "have you nothing to say?"

Sheldon turned from the window and looked at the gaunt figure before the fireplace. There was no longer any fire in Thole's eyes, and his whole frame seemed to sag from head to foot; for the moment the old spirit had quite gone out of him.

"I don't think I have anything to say," Sheldon said. "I don't believe that there is anything to be said or to be done. It's finished."

Thole shifted his feet uneasily and turned the now mild gray eyes toward his son. "You are going back to—to her?"

"Of course. What else is there for me to do, now that I know how much she needs me?"

Thole nodded. "Of course," he muttered, "of course."

"I can at least try to make up in a way," Sheldon went on, "for all that she has suffered from you. That will be something worth while anyhow—certainly better than to remain here as you must remain, discredited by men and a joke among the women you call your friends."

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"I wish you'd sit down a minute," Thole said doggedly. "I've got to tell you this before you go. I've got to tell you, because I'd rather and, perhaps, you'd rather hear it from me than from her."

Sheldon sat on the arm of a big leather chair and, by way of assent, shrugged his shoulders.

Once more Thole shifted his feet uneasily and began: "I first knew your mother not very long after her husband's death. You mayn't know it, but he'd never treated her particularly well, and when he died he left her destitute, penniless, and she was very lonely. Then I came along, and we were together a great deal. I'd come from up state, and I didn't know many people, and the only trouble was that almost as soon as I started in I began to make money. The game was a good deal easier then than it is now. I guess she must have been fond of me and sort of proud of my success, and it was always understood that we were going to be married, and then when the time came that I should have made good I didn't do it. I'd begun to get the fever for money and the power that money brings, and I suppose I was just money-mad like so many people get in New York. I was afraid that a wife and a family would interfere with my plans and interfere in my

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success; of course it would probably have been the making of me, but I couldn't see it that way then. I was just a common, selfish brute, with an unlimited greed for money, and ready to tramp down anything that stood in my way of getting it. That was just about the way of it, and even when you were born, I couldn't do the decent thing. It was a little after that that your mother moved to Dunham, where no one knew her or anything about her, and where there was no reason for any one to believe that you were not her husband's child."

Sheldon stood up, and for a few moments Thole's eyes followed the younger man in silence as he paced slowly up and down the room. Then in the same dogged voice he went on again:

"I'm not trying to excuse myself—I deserted her all right, and I guess I got my punishment. As you say, you can go back to her, and as you say, too, I've got to stay on here, discredited and a joke, and believe me, so long as I live, I won't forget that it was my own son who said that to me. You got your revenge right there. There's never been a day for the last twenty years—and you can believe it or not, but it's God's truth—when I wouldn't have gone back to her. But she wasn't like any other woman

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I ever knew. From the day I told her I couldn't or wouldn't marry her she's never spoken to me or let me see her. And what hurt most was that she wouldn't let me do anything to help her. She returned the drafts I sent her, and after a while she sent back my letters unopened. I—"Thole stopped suddenly and slowly pressed one clenched hand into the open palm of the other. "I guess that's all," he added impotently. "She's suffered and I've suffered, and now it looks as if you were to get yours. I tell you it's the call of this big rotten town. She heard it and I heard it, and then it came your turn. That's the way of it—I've watched 'em for a good many years, the young men and the young women from the little towns coming here to fight New York with their puny bodies and their puny brains. I've watched 'em by the dozens flounder about for a while and then sink and not leave enough for a decent funeral."

Sheldon stopped pacing up and down the room and turning suddenly faced his father. "Is that all?" he asked brusquely.

The older man drew back as if the boy had struck him. "Why, yes, Archie," he said, "I guess that's all. You mean you're going now?"

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“Yes.”

“And there’s nothing I can do?” Thole asked.

“Nothing, thank God. I only wish that there was something I could do or say to make you suffer as you have made me suffer.”

The hard grim features of Thole relaxed into something that resembled a smile. “My boy—Archie,” he said, and his voice had suddenly become very low, even gentle, “if you were older and if you had ever had a son of your own, you wouldn’t worry about how you could hurt me. You would understand that all you had to do was just what you are doing now—walking out of this room for the last time without even giving me your hand or saying good-by.”

Thole waited until he had heard the outer door close on his son for the last time, and then it suddenly occurred to him that it was very chilly in the room, and he turned to find that there was nothing in the fireplace but gray ashes. He drew his tall frame erect and looked about at the dishevelled room. To his eyes the roses appeared faded and unlovely, and the curtains of smilax as if they were not real but some tawdry device of a scene on the stage. With one hand he reached out, and, seizing a few of the green fragile strands, tore them from their fasten-

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ings, and, throwing them to the floor, crushed them under his foot. Moving very slowly, he crossed the room to the window. To the east the dawn of the new day had streaked the purple sky with long narrow ribbons of gray and pink lights; down in the park the lamps of a taxicab swung in a great arc and then disappeared behind a black screen of foliage; to the north he could see the lights twinkling in the upper story of a building that rose high above the trees; but to the eyes of Thole the city lay before him, a great sleeping octopus, its unclean body calmly resting for the work of the coming day. If there was anything of beauty there he, at least, had failed to find it; for had it not this night, in spite of all his money and his power, taken from him his one last chance of happiness? And then it came to him that in a few hours the battle would be on again, and that he must have sleep, because he would have to be in his place and ready. And, so, he turned from the window and the sleeping city and, with slow, unsteady steps, moved toward his own room.

GOD'S MATERIAL

DAVID PRINDLE gathered up his change and his monthly commutation ticket and, through the grated window, smiled at the station agent. David said: "A fine morning for the first of December," but the thought in his mind was: "I have now in my pocket two dollars, and this added to the seventy dollars I have in bank will not pay the monthly bills, and I wonder which of the monthly bills I can best leave unpaid."

For five years now, on the first day of every month, Prindle had been facing the same question, whether it was better to rob Peter and pay Paul or Pay Peter and let Paul wait. Every morning as he sat with his fellow commuters and smoked his pipe and tried to read his newspaper his thoughts were seldom far afield from the question of the high cost of living. The same thoughts usually filled his mind on the return trip, but no sooner had he left the stuffy, smoke-ridden car than such gloomy reveries took instant flight. His head held high, his shoul-

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ders thrown back, with long, swinging strides he swung along the broad country road that led to his home. And such a home! The very first glimpse that he caught of the white clapboard farmhouse never failed to cause the same old thrill. Evil reflections concerning unpaid bills, the long, dull routine of the day's work, the years of incessant struggle were forgotten, and the only thoughts that filled his tired, overworked brain were of the little house hidden among the trees and the figure of the girl sure to be waiting for him before the open door. That was about all there was in David's life—this one girl and the open door. And so intertwined were they in his heart and in his mind that they seemed like two happy dreams constantly fading one into another, both very distinct and quite inseparable. For it was in this same farmhouse that David and his beloved Angela had begun their married life. It was the only home they had ever known together, and (with the exception of a new roof and an addition which was to contain an oak-panelled library and a pink-and-gold bedroom for Angela) it was the only home they ever wanted to know.

For one year David had paid a modest rental, but at the end of that time, so satisfied were he and

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Angela that it was the best home in the world, they decided to buy the place outright. Therefore, having carefully counted their capital and such prospects as the future might have in store for them, they called on the agent of the property and briefly told him of their heart's desire. The agent admitted that the owner had no possible use for the house himself and would no doubt be glad to part with it on easy terms. These surmises proved correct, and in a week's time David and Angela once more met at the agent's office to sign the all-important papers.

The agent sat behind his flat desk, smiled a little mysteriously, and with one finger tapped the long, red-sealed deeds that lay before him.

"Mr. Dolliver, whom I represent," he began, "is willing to accede to the terms that you suggest. My client, however reluctantly, must insist on one condition which it is quite possible may deter you from buying the property."

David and Angela exchanged swift, unhappy glances, and then David nodded for the lawyer to continue.

"The original owner of the house, one Abraham Enright, decreed in his will that so long as the house lasted the eldest male member of the family of En-

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right should always have the privilege of occupying a certain room for so long a period as he saw fit. That was a long time ago—at least three generations—and although the property has changed hands several times that same clause has always appeared in the deed. The eldest living descendant of Abraham Enright, if there is one, still has the right to occupy that room. I believe it is the one at the northern end of the house on the second floor.”

“Then, as I understand it,” said David, “although we own the house we are liable at any time to have a stranger wander in and settle down in our only spare room, and perhaps stay there until he dies?”

“Exactly,” said the agent. “But I think it is only fair to say that since the condition was first made no one, so far as is known, has ever taken advantage of the privilege.”

For a few tense moments David alternately turned his glance from the keen, smiling eyes of the lawyer to the deeds, and then back to the lawyer.

“Do you not think,” he suggested, “if I saw your client and explained how——”

“Not a chance in the world,” the lawyer interrupted. “To be quite frank with you, I don’t believe he cares very much whether he sells the property

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or not. Personally, and I speak from a long experience, I consider the terms, in spite of this unusual condition, very favorable to you."

David glanced at Angela and saw tears slowly ebbing into the eyes that he loved the best in all the world. Without another word he reached for the deeds and quickly seized the pen the lawyer proffered him. Even with less hesitation Angela affixed her signature, and the little farmhouse, with the exception of its one absurd and annoying condition, was their very own.

When David and Angela had once more returned home they spent the evening in speculating on the probable personality, condition of life, and habits of the stranger who at any moment might demand a place in their household. The name of the creator of the unhappy condition was as unknown to them as was that of the present head of the house of Enright. They speculated about him that particular night and for the next five years, with occasional brief lapses, they continued to speculate about him. The oldest living inhabitant of the neighborhood could not remember an Abraham Enright and where he had gone and who were his heirs no one knew. But to David and Angela the present heir was a very

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real person and a distinct menace to their lives. During the five years of speculation their composite guesses had assumed the form and character of a real individual. According to this gradually conceived idea the mysterious stranger who was legally entitled to upset their lives was a rather elderly person with few humane or kindly instincts. Also, although David and Angela always referred to him as "the family skeleton," he was very short and stout, had a stubby, iron-gray beard and a most ungovernable temper. This in their hours of depression was the ogre they always saw. They pictured the roly-poly form stumping up the road; they saw him standing in the doorway gruffly demanding entrance; and they saw him in their one spare bedroom—irritable, gouty, and, with his meagre, uncouth belongings, settled there for life. It was for the latter reason, perhaps, that of all the little home the spare room alone failed to grow in beauty and comfort. A typical farmhouse bedroom, cold, gray, and cheerless they had found it, and cold, gray, and cheerless Angela and David had allowed it to remain. It was as if they had prepared a vault to receive the remains of all their happiest and most cherished hopes.

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However, apart from the always expected visit from the unwelcome guest, Angela and David had known five years of well-nigh perfect content. It is true that to keep the place in proper repair, to add to its simple comforts, to make Angela's flower-garden worthy of its lovely mistress had been no easy task, and had been accomplished not without many unmentioned deeds of sacrifice and privation. For ten years David had worked hard and faithfully for the company with whom he had found his first employment, but, fortunately or unfortunately, David had been born with a nature which contained sweetness and kindliness out of all proportion to aggressiveness or business acumen. Therefore, as is the usual fate of such personalities, he had become but a human cog in a great human wheel that with each revolution ground out many dollars for its owners. For ten years David had served his masters well and just as far as he was allowed to serve them, and, then, when he had reached the office on the morning of that first day of December, he found the place filled with whispered rumors that chilled the hearts of the human cogs. Big Business had laid its steel hand on the wheel of human cogs and hereafter it was to play but a minor part in a really great ma-

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chine. David and all the other human cogs knew that Big Business brought with it sons and nephews and cousins, all of whom must have jobs, and, late that same afternoon, the fears of David, at least, proved correct.

With a heavy heart he alighted from the train and with feet of lead he started to plod wearily over the brittle, frozen roads to his home. After ten long years! But the thought that was uppermost in David's mind was not one of reproach against the company but against himself. Human cogs of ten years' standing could not easily find new positions, and David knew this as well as he knew that with all the needs of his home pressing upon him he had been unable to lay by. During the period of their married life David had held no secret from his wife, and now, more than ever before, he needed the help of her love and of her fine, young courage. They sat down before the wood fire in the little sitting-room, and with no word of bitterness David told the tragedy that had come into their lives. After he had finished the two lovers sat in silence. Gazing into the crackling fire, her chin resting in the palm of one hand, Angela stretched out her other hand until it lay in that of her husband. For a few moments

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they remained thus, and then, suddenly, they were aroused from their unhappy reveries by the incessant tooting of an automobile horn, evidently clamoring for admission at their garden gate.

"Delmonico's," said Johnny Enright to his chauffeur, and, with a dolorous sigh of discontent, fell back into the deep-cushioned seat of his limousine. To be whisked away in such a gorgeous, purple-lined chariot to a banquet at Delmonico's might have brought a smile of anticipatory pleasure to some young men, but not to Johnny Enright. Had it been a dinner with a few congenial friends, that would have been a very different matter, but of all the chores that his business life very occasionally forced upon him, the annual banquet given to the big men in his employ bored him the most. He hated the dinner with its innumerable courses, he hated the ostentatious souvenirs, the long-winded speeches, and, most of all, he hated the speech that he himself had to make. Had it not been for the latter he could at least have partially forgotten his dislike of the occasion by indulging in large libations of champagne. But as vice-president and the practical owner of the Universal Milk Company it was neces-

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sary for him to appear at his very best when the time came for him to address the officers and the district managers of that eminently successful concern.

The banquet itself proved to be very much like every other banquet, whether the price is five dollars a plate or five times that amount. The dinner proper once over, the old gentlemen at the speakers' table, one by one, arose and gravely threw verbal bouquets at every one present, including themselves. Johnny sat between two of these elderly, bearded persons and dreamily wondered whether he would spend the next day in town or go to Rye to play golf. And then he was suddenly aroused from his reverie by a sudden break in the oratory which at least to Enright seemed to have been rumbling on for hours. A little way down the table a young man with a Henry Clay face and a rarely sympathetic voice was telling his elders something of the worth of Abraham Enright, whose sagacity and high principles had brought the Universal Milk Company into being and to whom every man present owed a debt of gratitude that none could ever hope to pay. From Abraham Enright the young and convincing orator passed to his son, John Enright, and, having properly crowned him with laurel, proceeded to decorate the present

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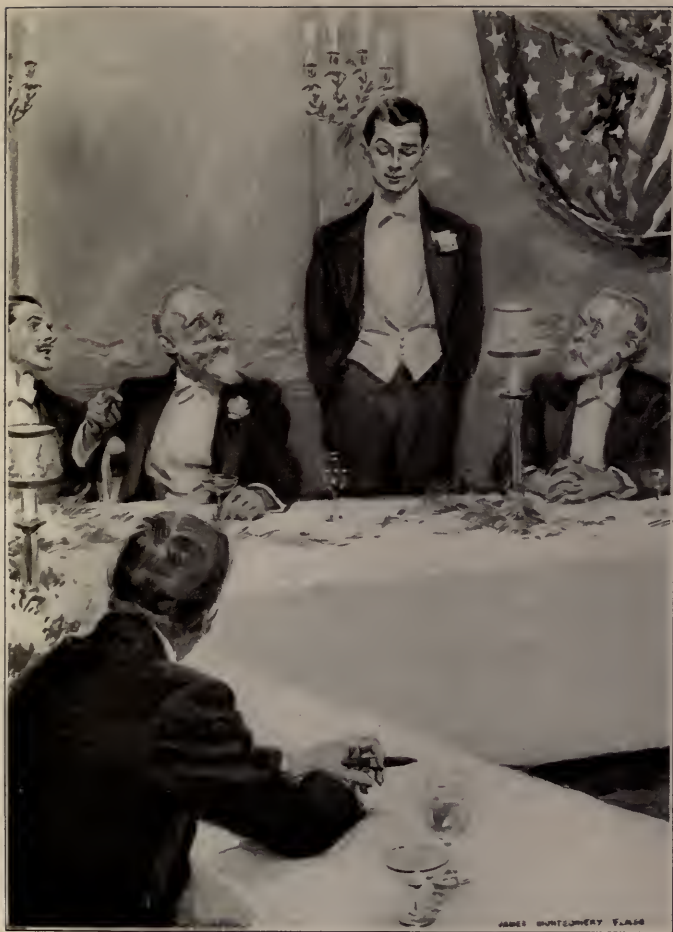
head of the house in a similar manner. With a flushed face and downcast eyes Johnny heard himself credited with a list of virtues to not one of which could he possibly lay claim. A few minutes later, confused and still blushing, Johnny himself arose and heartily thanked the young man for mentioning all the things that he should be and wasn't, but promised faithfully that the hint should not go unheeded. To his great relief the banquet came to a fairly early end, the mass of black coats and white shirt-fronts at last arose, disintegrated, and finally disappeared. With a huge sigh Johnny hustled into a fur coat, and, with all possible despatch, started for the nearest cabaret.

It was early afternoon on the following day when Enright awoke from a heavy sleep and rang for his servant. The strain of remaining respectable during the long banquet had been too much for him, and to make up for it he had one-stepped and fox-trotted and supped at the cabaret until the new day was well on its way. His first half-crystallized thought was of the beautiful young butterfly with whom he had danced away the early morning hours, and then his mind suddenly reverted to the boy orator with the Henry Clay face who had so glowingly described

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the great and good work of the three generations of Enrights. Perhaps the youthful district manager had said what he said because he believed it, or perhaps he thought that it would help him with the officers of the company and bring him instant preferment, but, whatever his intention, there could be no doubt that his words had sunk deep into the guilty, joyous soul of Johnny Enright.

For some time Enright lay gazing up at the ceiling, listening to his servant moving stealthily about the room, and then he cast a guilty glance at the clock. To his further chagrin he found that it was nearly half-past three. Of course, it was too late for golf, and, as he had no dinner engagement, a long, dull afternoon and night in town faced him ominously. He was thoroughly discouraged at the outlook and he was more discouraged about himself. The words of the district manager orator returned to taunt him and upbraid him for not having lived the fine, useful life that his father and grandfather had lived instead of that of the pampered son of a multimillionnaire—a waster. And then, as he still lay gazing up at the ceiling, but now quite wide-awake, there came to his mind a talk he had had with his father just before the old man had died.



Confused and still blushing, Johnny heartily thanked the young man.

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The conversation that he now recalled so vividly seemed to fit in most curiously with the district manager's speech as well as his gloomy views concerning his own present worthless existence.

They had been sitting together in his father's study and the gist of the old man's words was this:

"To-day, my son, I have made you my sole heir, but, for certain reasons, there is one bequest I did not mention in my will. Your grandfather began life as a plain farmer. He was born and brought up on a little place that was known as The Oaks, near a town called Millbrook, in Jersey. As a boy he worked on the farm, and among his other chores he drove the cows to and from the pasture and milked them. Long before he died he established one of the biggest milk concerns this or any other country has ever known. When he was successful he moved to New York, but in a way he held on to the farm at Millbrook. He practically gave the place over to an old farmer and his wife, but he always retained the privilege of spending a night there whenever he saw fit. And, in spite of his town house and the big place he built afterward at Elberon, he frequently availed himself of the privilege. He contended that one night at the old farm not only did his nerves a

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world of good but kept his relative values straight. If the money came in a little too fast he would run down and have a look at the old cow pasture and the barnyard where he had worked as a barefooted boy. And when he felt that his power was getting the better of his heart and his common sense he would spend a night in his old whitewashed room at the farm, sleep on a corn-husk mattress, and go back to town chastened and ready to help others who hadn't had his luck or his talent for success. When your grandfather died he left the old place to the farmer wha had looked after it for him, but it was stipulated in the deed that the oldest male member of his family should always have the right to occupy his bedroom."

"And did you ever take advantage of the privilege?" Johnny asked.

"Not exactly," said Johnny's father. "The place had changed hands before I grew old enough and wise enough to feel the need of it. But several times I ran down there and looked at the farm where father had made his start, and I must say it always helped me over some hard place. Do as you feel best about it, my boy, but the privilege of spending a night, or as many nights as you choose, in the old house is yours, and I'm pretty sure that some of

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these days it might do you good to take advantage of it."

For the first time Johnny was old enough and wise enough to understand what his father's words had meant and his mind was already made up. Jumping out of bed, he ordered his chauffeur to report at once with his touring-car, told his servant to pack his bag for one night, and then proceeded to complete his hasty toilet. Half an hour later he was in his big gray touring-car, alone, and driving it toward the Fort Lee ferry as fast as the speed laws would permit. It was a fine, crisp December day, and the clear, sharp air of the North River made his blood tingle and drove away every vestige of the unhappy effects of the last long, hard night. The farther he went, the more times he lost his way, the more broadly did Johnny Enright smile at his adventure. It was already dark; he was soon to knock at the door of a house he had never seen and demand a night's lodging of people of whose names he was even ignorant. His mind, now alert and keen, fairly thrilled at the idea, and he compared himself to the imaginative heroes of the "Arabian Nights." The latter thought it was, no doubt, that made him decide to emulate the adventurers of the fiction of the Far East and pre-

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sent himself to his unknown hosts under an assumed name. Then, later, when they had rudely refused him admission, he would dramatically declare his true identity. Who, indeed, should say now that Johnny Enright was without imagination or that there was no longer the spirit of adventure throughout the land!

Thus it was, when David left Angela by the fire and went out to his front gate, the young man in the gray car introduced himself as Mr. Brown-Jones. The stranger also admitted that he had lost his way and was thoroughly chilled after his long ride. Ten minutes later Mr. Brown-Jones was before the Prindle fireplace and, with its help and that of a hot whiskey toddy that Angela had brewed for him, was gradually being thawed into a state of genial warmth. When, still later, Mr. Brown-Jones suggested that he continue on his way, Angela and David only laughed at the idea, and both of them insisted on accompanying him to the spare bedchamber to be sure that everything that could be done was done for the unexpected guest.

"We always have it ready," said David as he lighted the candle that stood before the sadly tar-

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nished mirror. "We've been expecting a guest these five years."

"A long wait," said Mr. Brown-Jones. "You must have been looking forward to his coming with much pleasure."

David looked at Angela and smiled. "Hardly that, Mr. Brown-Jones," he said. "But it's a long story, and I'll tell you at dinner."

David not only told the story at dinner, but he told of all of his and Angela's fears as to the coming of this Enright—the ogre who might legally settle down on them, bag and baggage, for the rest of his days, and put an end to all their happiness. And then, while Angela talked, David wondered, now that he had lost his job, if there was to be any more happiness. Johnny Enright, alias Brown-Jones, smiled pleasantly at Angela as she chatted on, but he really heard nothing of what she said. For he, too, was wondering—wondering that any two people could find so much happiness in the world as these two babes in the wood on whom, by some curious whim of fate, he had so unexpectedly stumbled. After dinner, indeed until far into the night, they sat about the fire and, as the hours grew, so grew the confidence in each other of these three new friends. There

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was something so genial and gay, a certain human warmth about Mr. Brown-Jones, that, to Angela and David, it seemed to permeate the whole room and completely envelop their minds and hearts. So intimate became the talk that David even confided to the stranger the dream of the new wing which was to contain the oak-panelled library and the pink-and-gold bedroom for Angela. And then, when it was very late, and without knowing exactly why or how, David told of the great tragedy that had befallen them that very day. But, although the stranger spoke words of sympathy, David, and Angela, too, were a little hurt to note how lightly he regarded the loss of a job. Indeed, in the very midst of David's tale of woe, Mr. Brown-Jones clasped his hands over his stomach, gazed fixedly at the rafters, and smiled as if a new and beautiful idea had just entered his good-looking head.

Angela and David were up and about early the next morning, but not so early as the stranger, whom they found wandering happily about the barnyard.

"Never have I felt so refreshed," said Mr. Brown-Jones. "That room of yours is a tonic—almost an inspiration. It has given even me a whole lot of ideas."



Mr. Brown-Jones smiled as if a new and beautiful idea had just entered his good-looking head.

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It was at breakfast that Enright disclosed his identity and told them of the ideas.

"Down at Norfolk," he said, "I've got a houseboat waiting for me. It's a bit of a tub, but rather comfortable. We'll drift down the canals to Florida, and play golf at Saint Augustine and roulette at Palm Beach. And then, if the notion seizes us, we can go to New Orleans for the carnival and a dinner at Jules's, or we can run over to Havana for some good green cigars. What do you say?—I'll even promise to have you back in time for Angela to do her spring planting. And, in addition to the gardening it will then be high time for David and I to begin our real life's work with the Universal Milk Company. The company mayn't know that, but we know it."

At the moment neither Angela nor David gave an answer; in fact, they never did give an answer in words. David tried to say something, but it was a rather sorry effort, and Angela, suddenly jumping up from the table, ran to her bedroom, from which she later returned with a nose much bepowdered.

True to his word, Enright brought them back just as the first crocus in Angela's garden poked its head into the warm spring sunshine. A few months of

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luxurious ease had in no way dimmed their love for the little farmhouse. As they turned the bend in the road and caught the first glimpse of it there was still the same thrill. The same old home—and yet, as they drew nearer, they found it was not quite the same. Evidently the fairies had been at work overnight, for there it was—the new wing. On close inspection they found the oak-panelled library, just as it had appeared in David's dreams, and a pink-and-gold bedroom—almost as exquisite in its loveliness as the loveliness of Angela herself. Everywhere, as they ran through the house like two laughing children, they found new treasures—treasures devised and created by the clever architect and the cleverer lady decorator, both of whom served under the golden wand of Johnny Enright. Everywhere they found something new to admire and to wonder at—everywhere except in one room, which they found just as they had left it. The golden wand of Johnny Enright had spared that one room. There it was, cold, gray, uncompromising—a hard-bound legacy, a reminder of other, simpler days.

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MERCITA HOBBS dropped the evening paper on her lap, clasped her hands behind her head and stared steadily at the freshly calsimined ceiling.

"That sounds like a wonderful white sale at Dobey's to-morrow," she said. "One ought to pick up some real bargains—that is if the advertisement doesn't lie. They claim to have some combinations for three-twenty-five marked down——"

Rather vague as to just what his wife had been saying, Hobbs appeared from behind Dillon's rival evening paper and in a dazed way glanced across the centre-table.

"Yes, of course," he stammered, "combinations. Cheap, eh?"

Without removing her eyes from the ceiling Mercita's pretty lips puckered and then wavered into a mirthless, almost cynical smile.

"I can remember, Bexley, dear," she cooed, "when you were rather keen about lingerie for your little wifey. But that was six long months ago—*six* long months."

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"Six very short months I should say," Hobbs temporized with a rather feeble effort at gallantry. "If I am not very enthusiastic about white sales or any other kind of sales just now, my dear, you know the reason. Our income is unfortunately a fixed quantity and we have been living a trifle beyond it. The calculations I made before our wedding, now that they have been put to a practical test, have not quite worked out, that's all. A little economy for a few months and by the early summer we shall be all square again. Why, only this evening, on my way home, I saw some plaid ties in Kendrick's window marked down to twenty-five cents. In my bachelor days I should have bought several without a moment's thought, but the fact that I couldn't buy them now didn't worry me at all. Not a bit of it. I said to myself, 'Bexley,' said I, 'your old ties are good enough. And what if you can't take a few plaid ties home with you? Haven't you got the prettiest and the brightest wife in the town of Dillon waiting there for you?' Now that's the way you ought to feel about advertisements of white sales and—and things."

From her youth Mercita had been an omnivorous reader of all kinds of literature and had been born

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with an unusually retentive memory as well as a voice that was not only sweet and melodious but particularly well adapted to declamation. Under the circumstances it was quite natural that during an argument or even ordinary conversation she should quote freely from the classic authors. On this particular occasion her somewhat emotional mind turned to Stevenson's "Markheim," and, without vouchsafing a glance toward her husband, she delivered the following quotation directly at the ceiling. "If I be condemned to evil acts there is still one door of freedom open—I can cease from action. If my life be an ill thing I can lay it down. Though I be, as you say truly, at the beck of every small temptation, I can yet, by one decisive gesture, place myself beyond the reach of all."

Hobbs put his hand before his mouth and giggled audibly. Then he went over to the hearth, and, with his hands clasped behind his back, stood before the coal-grate fire and through his gold-rimmed eyeglasses beamed down pleasantly on his wife.

"That's a cheerful little thing," he said with a somewhat conscious chuckle. "Cute idea of yours, my dear, to take your life because you can't afford a suit of new underwear."

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Mrs. Hobbs turned her eyes from the ceiling to the weak, smiling face and the short, stooping figure of her husband and then back again to the ceiling.

"What matters the excuse," she said gravely, "so long as one's conscience is satisfied with the cause?"

The mother of Mrs. Hobbs had been conspicuous in clubs, a leader in the expression of all of women's most advanced and broadest views, and Mercita had inherited the greater part of her parent's somewhat advanced theories.

"I don't see what the cause has got to do with it," Hobbs said frankly perplexed at his wife's rather enigmatical speech. "Suicide is suicide and suicide is always wrong. It's criminal. If you try it and don't get away with it they can lock you up."

"They can in New York," Mercita corrected her husband with just the suggestion of a sneer. "They can't in this or any of the more enlightened states of the Middle West."

Mercita had a way of correcting her husband with statements the truthfulness of which his training which had been more commercial than general did not qualify him to question. Therefore, partly as a compliment to her superior education and partly

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to hide his own ignorance, he usually accepted what she said as final. But the idea of treating suicide so lightly he found most difficult to pass by without another word of protest. Self-destruction had always appealed to him as the act of a helpless coward or a lunatic and as a subject fit for discussion only among doctors and criminologists.

"All right," he said with a considerable show of feeling, "you may be right about the state laws on the subject but you must admit that the body of a suicide can't be buried in any first-class Christian cemetery. And in the Catholic Church—"

"A barbaric tradition of religions," his wife interrupted, "that is crumbling as fast as the religions are themselves. The old-time fear that the suicide once had for the punishment hereafter is now a bugaboo only fit to scare old men and children with. To prove that I'm right all you've got to do is to look up the statistics and see how steadily the cases of suicide have kept step with the advancement of education, and this advancement means the promotion of materialism and the happily growing disbelief in all things supernatural, especially this book of fairy tales called the Bible."

As Mercita fairly hurled her words at him Hobbs

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remained silent, impotently locking and unlocking his fingers behind his back. It was as if she were pounding him in the face with her fists. In the days of his courtship he had always regretted that Mercita so seldom went to church with him; after their marriage he was sorry to find that she did not say her prayers, but his religion had always been something too sacred to him, too near his heart, for him to discuss with any one, and, heretofore, she, on her part, had respected his feelings by avoiding the subject. But now she was wantonly defaming his belief and actually upholding the crime of suicide as a decent and respectable act. The walls of the house that he had built after so much effort and with so much care were crumbling about his head, and his dull, slow-plodding brain saw no way to prevent the total destruction of his home. Even had he had the temerity to refute his wife's words he would not have done so. Imperious, cruel as she might be, his whole heart was filled with his great love for her, and his innate chivalry for women alone held his tongue in leash. Therefore, with no further words but a clumsy effort at a bow which was supposed to interpret his injured dignity, he went out into the hallway, put on his hat and overcoat, and left the house.

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It was a cool, pleasant evening in late February. Light, gray clouds floated leisurely across a whitish-silver moon and an occasional star peeped down on the deserted avenue lined with its rows of leafless poplars and semi-detached villas. With his usual regard for health, Hobbs buttoned his overcoat tightly over his chest and, thrusting his gloved hands deep in his pockets, started to walk slowly in the direction toward which his feet unconsciously led him. It was quite the most unhappy promenade on which he had ever set forth, and the saddest part of it was that Hobbs himself thoroughly realized that however far the walk and his thoughts might take him conditions so far as he was concerned would remain absolutely unchanged. As chief clerk in one of the leading hardware stores of the town he was sure of a certain income, but the firm was old-fashioned and conservative, satisfied with its present profits, and so long as there was no perceptible increase in the profits there would surely be none in Hobbs's salary. He had no other sources of income and his wife had spent the last cent of her patrimony on her trousseau. Indeed it was her penniless condition to which the town of Dillon attributed the willingness of so pretty and intelligent a girl as

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Mercita to marry so dull although eminently respectable a young man as Bexley Hobbs.

Ever since their marriage Hobbs's financial plans had gone wrong. His figures as to the rent, electric-light, telephone, interest on his life insurance policy, had all proved correct, but almost every other item of expense had far exceeded his most liberal calculations. The reserve fund which he had stored up against possible illness or some unforeseen calamity had long since been swept away and he was already in debt to several of the tradespeople. Of late he had practised the most rigid economy, but Mercita who neither understood nor cared for the details of housekeeping had done very little to lighten his burden. That his wife should care for pretty clothes and the things dear to all women's hearts Hobbs admitted to be natural and fair, but that she should express her rage over the lack of money to buy a new hat or a suit of underwear by attacking the Christian religion or threatening to commit suicide appealed to him as neither the one nor the other. The idea that Mercita should for one moment ever think of taking her life was of course too absurd for Hobbs to consider, and he decided to dismiss it from his mind for all time.

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He hastened his lagging steps, and, in the effort to enliven his thoughts, tried to whistle a tune and glanced up at the fleecy clouds chasing each other across the moon. But try as he might he found it difficult to divert his thoughts from Mercita and her troubles. When she had complained that her trousseau was worn out Hobbs freely admitted to himself that she was no doubt right. Also, she was perfectly correct when she contended that since her marriage the young men of Dillon no longer asked her to dances and to the theatre. Now they left that pleasure to her husband and her husband did not avail himself of that pleasure. That Hobbs had not the money available for such luxuries did not alter the fact that it was Mercita's marriage to him that had deprived her of them.

Once more Hobbs quickened his pace and tried to interest himself in the beauty of the heavens, but he found himself reluctantly admitting that for the last two months Mercita and he had spent every evening at their own fireside, and that from this or for some other cause his wife had been constantly growing irritable and dissatisfied. Not only had this spirit of discontent grown upon her but of late she had

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often suffered from fits of real depression, and now that he gave the matter his serious consideration he remembered that she had lost much of her former brilliant coloring and had frequently looked decidedly pale and wan. Unconsciously Hobbs came to a sudden halt, and, in a confused way having stared about him, found that he had walked a good half-mile from his home. Sharply he turned and started to retrace his steps.

Again he tried to whistle and to fill his mind with pleasant, hopeful thoughts of the spring when he would have paid his debts and would be in a position to give Mercita some new clothes and a few jolly outings. But such happy thoughts were wholly forced and his disturbed mind cast them out and once more raced back to Mercita. Of course even in her unenviable and discontented condition she would not consider suicide, but Hobbs could not help regretting that any woman so emotional as his wife should hold the crime of suicide so lightly, indeed should regard the act as no crime at all. From a quick walk he broke into a trot.

Exactly why he should make such haste to reach his home Hobbs in his breathless, excited state would not have admitted to himself, even could he have done

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so. But the seed of fear, the dread of oncoming disaster and disgrace had been planted in his heart, and now that his cottage was in sight he fairly flew along the hard clay path. A few minutes later Mercita heard the front door thrown back and saw her husband suddenly appear before her at the sitting-room door. He was quite breathless and when he saw her sitting calmly by the centre-table she noticed the curious look of joy that flamed up in his wide-open eyes. He gave a quick sigh, and, for a moment, leaned heavily against the door-frame.

"Bexley," Mercita demanded, "what *is* the matter with you? Have you seen a ghost or have you been training for the Y. M. C. A. sports? My dear, you're a sight."

By way of answer to his wife's pleasantries Hobbs smiled weakly at her and then pulling himself together went back to the hallway and hung up his hat and coat.

With no conspicuous change, life at the Hobbs's cottage drifted on as before. Hobbs spent his days at the store and Mercita read and occasionally attended a meeting of some society devoted to the advancement of women. At night, after supper, they read the local evening papers and played cards,

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sometimes by themselves and sometimes with neighbors who had dropped in for the evening. Mercita grew a trifle more pale, at least Hobbs thought she did. That she became more dissatisfied and despondent and that Hobbs was more worried and solicitous about his wife there could be no question whatever. Two weeks after the night that Mercita had first expressed her views on suicide she went to see a friend who was lying ill at a hospital. That evening she told Hobbs of her visit.

"It has a great charm for me," she said, "the life of a nurse. They see so much of human nature and I've always loved the study of drugs. Even the rows of little bottles in the glass case fascinate me. I saw a bottle of laudanum there to-day which I was greatly tempted to steal. It's curious how in the old days people were allowed to carry the most deadly poison about with them in a signet ring, but now we have to steal it at hospitals or get harmless doses at a drug-store and then only with a doctor's prescription.

"And yet they call it a free country. Why there are some states in the enlightened East where no one is allowed to own a revolver without a permit from the mayor or the governor or something."

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Hobbs lowered his newspaper and forced a smile to his lips.

"That's only a precaution the law takes," he explained, "for the protection of the mentally weak or people who are subject to violent passions. With a deadly poison or a revolver at hand there are no doubt many men and women who in a moment of——"

"Did you read about that man who killed himself in Buffalo yesterday?" Mercita interrupted, and, without waiting for her husband's reply, ran on. "Well, he went to a small hotel, stuffed up the cracks of the windows and doors with newspapers and turned on the gas. All he left was one line scribbled on the back of an old envelope: 'Not good enough.' Now there was a man after my own heart. Nobody asked him permission to bring him into the world and he didn't ask any one's permission to leave it."

Hobbs did not continue the conversation but that night he preceded his wife to their bedroom and having taken a revolver from a bureau drawer, where he had always kept it in case of burglars, locked it in his desk. Then he went carefully about the room looking for any article with which Mercita could possibly make an end of herself, but finding nothing went to

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bed and tried to sleep. The next day when he returned from work he found Mercita ill in bed, and he insisted on sending for the family physician, Dr. Brandt. When the doctor left Mercita's bedroom he found Hobbs waiting for him in the parlor. Dr. Brandt was a stout, florid, cheerful man, and, in his physical aspect as well as in his mental attitude toward life, in striking contrast to little, stoop-shouldered, nervous Hobbs.

"Nothing serious, I hope?" said Hobbs, drawing the doctor into the dimly-lighted parlor.

"Not at all," said Brandt assuringly, "not at all serious. Nerves upset and a little run down, I should think. Needs a tonic and more fresh air and exercise. I'm going to give her some strychnine, and you see that she takes the pills regularly. I'll leave the prescription at Blair's on my way down town."

Hobbs felt his throat getting dry and he spoke with some little difficulty.

"But strychnine is a pretty strong poison, isn't it, doctor?" he asked.

"It is if you take too much of it at one time," Brandt laughed. "Don't worry, Bexley; Mercita's a careful patient and I don't imagine you're afraid of her taking an overdose on purpose."

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Hobbs forced a smile to his parched lips. "Naturally not," he said, "naturally not. I suppose I'm a little timid about poisons—always have been. I had a friend once whose wife used to threaten to kill herself."

Brandt tossed up his hands. "Then God help your friend," he said. "But at that I'll bet his wife took it out in threats. It's a curious thing, Bexley. History shows that about four men commit suicide to one woman, but if the statistics could be taken I'll bet they would prove that four thousand women threaten to one that finally does the act."

Hobbs wet his lips with his tongue and nodded gravely. "Very curious," he said.

"Curious," Brandt repeated, "curious! Why its the most cruel and insidious weapon that God ever put in the power of human beings. In my own professional experience I've known several men whose wives had the habit. Not one of the women had the first idea of killing herself even if she'd had the nerve. But the husbands went about with this sword hanging over their heads night and day and such constant terror in their hearts that it became an obsession. It cramped their lives, gradually used up their nervous systems and in two cases the health of the men

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cracked entirely. Of course, the psychology of it was that the husbands thought that this sword that their wives had swung over their heads hung by a thread, while as a matter of fact it was held by the cords of fear and the innate love of life which, as cords go, are about as big and strong as a couple of wire hawsers."

"It does seem pretty hard on the men," Hobbs protested mildly, "especially when they love their wives. It's the one argument that just through his fear of the consequences a husband can't answer, and, then, of course, one can never be sure that his wife is not *the* one of the four thousand."

"One out of four thousand is a long chance," Brandt laughed. "Anyhow I wouldn't worry about Mercita. Mercita's not over vain and this talk about suicide is only woman's egotism carried to the highest possible degree. Good-night to you."

For some time after Brandt had left Hobbs remained alone in the parlor, and, so far as he was able, repeated over and over again all that the physician had said. But although he found much comfort and probable truth in Brandt's words he could not help regretting that the physician should have recommended strychnine as a tonic for his wife—especially

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in her present nervous and discontented condition. In time he went to Mercita's room, and sitting by the bedside tried to amuse her by telling of what he had done during the day and by reading bits of news from the evening papers. Just when he had apparently succeeded in slightly arousing her interest the boy from the drug-store arrived with the strychnine. The little white tablets were in a small bottle, and, with a show of complete indifference, Hobbs handed them to his wife.

"Do you know what these are?" she asked.

"Brandt told me he was going to give you strychnine, I think," Bexley said carelessly.

"That's right," Mercita said with a wan smile, "and, Bexley dear, don't get them mixed up with your digestive tablets. They're pretty strong, you know." For a few moments she held the vial up before her and stared at the contents. "Half of those, Bexley, would be quite enough to do for you—quite. Fetch me a glass of water, won't you please?"

Hobbs hurried downstairs for the water, and when he returned he found Mercita sitting up in bed. In one hand she held the empty vial and in the palm of the other lay the little white tablets. As Bexley

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approached the bed Mercita glanced up at her husband and then carefully poured all of the tablets except one back into the bottle.

On the following morning when Hobbs started to work, although the condition of his wife seemed much improved, he left her with a feeling of real reluctance. Throughout the long day the picture of Mercita sitting up in bed, the white pellets cupped in her hand, was always before him. He did his best to make light of his fears and tried to console himself with Brandt's words of the preceding evening. But the terror that Mercita might even then be lying dead never left him. Half a dozen times, on the pretext of asking how she was, he called her on the telephone. However, the last time that he called she asked him not to bother her again as she wanted to sleep, and, thus, his last source of communication was cut off. Instead of going to lunch he went to the public library and read all he could find in the encyclopedias concerning poisons, and especially strychnine and its antidotes. That evening on his way home he stopped in at a drug-store where he was unknown and bought some chloroform and chloral hydrate. But all that he had read that day and all of the books on toxicology, which he consulted

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afterward, held out but little hope if the patient had taken any considerable dose of the fatal drug.

Although Mercita continued to improve, that is so far as her physical condition was concerned, Hobbs grew more restless and his mind harbored but the one subject. In his moments of leisure at the shop it was his only topic of conversation with the other men, and whenever he could afford the time he hurried to the library and read what the most noted authorities had written on suicide and its causes. At home he was in constant dread of hurting his wife's feelings, and no longer with his former feeble arguments even pretended to combat her wishes. For fear of offending her he continued to go further in debt, and he became greatly alarmed that his employers would learn that he was living beyond his income. But Mercita was not satisfied and at times broke out in violent tirades against her unhappy lot. After such scenes she would usually fly to her room and Hobbs would be left alone in the little parlor, or, when he could stand the oppression of the room no longer, he would leave the house and walk until he was physically exhausted. At such times his mind constantly visualized the scene that would greet him on his return. As he entered the door the maid,

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crying hysterically, would greet him with the tragic news and he would bound up the stairways to his wife's bedroom. There he would find Mercita, the woman he loved, the only woman he ever could love, was passing forever out of his life and he alone was to blame. For had not this lovely girl given herself to him and had he not failed utterly to make her life worth the living? He could see her slight, beautiful body on the bed; the look of terror in the big blue eyes, the head jerked back, the limbs extended, the arched back. And there by her bedside he, Bexley Hobbs, who loved her better than all the world beside, would stand helpless and hopeless and impotently watch the end. Helpless and hopeless he would stand there and watch the scene that would sear his brain with a scar that would last as long as he did.

Such a scene, however, took place only in the half-crazed brain of Bexley Hobbs. Mercita continued to take her one tablet a day and to thrive on it. The cure had been progressing for about a fortnight when one evening she returned home much later than was her custom. To her husband who had been anxiously awaiting her coming she at once imparted her all important news. A week hence there was to be a gala meeting of the feminists of the state at the Opera

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House and she had been chosen to make the speech of welcome to the distinguished visitors.

“Bexley,” she said, her eyes shining with excitement and suspense, “it is going to be the greatest and the happiest hour of my life. But the occasion demands that I be properly dressed. I’m sorry because I know that you are hard up, but I must either get a new evening dress, and a really good one, or refuse this honor which the committee has offered me.”

It was an honor, a great honor to his wife, and Hobbs appreciated it, but he had no money, he was in debt, and his only assets were his life insurance policy and the few dollars he had in his pocket. His heart was of lead and he turned his unhappy eyes helplessly toward those of his wife.

“I don’t know how it can be done, Mercita,” he said, “but give me until to-morrow and I’ll promise you to do my best.”

During supper and afterward as they sat together in the parlor Mercita showed only too plainly that her feelings had been wounded and that her disappointment over her husband’s half-hearted promise was very keen. At ten o’clock Hobbs kissed his wife good night and said that he would take a short

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walk before going to bed. Left alone, Mercita's anger over what she considered the inadequacy of her husband to properly provide for her increased and she set about to devise some scheme whereby she could force him to accede to her wishes. In a short time she had thought out the details of a plan which she hastened to put into execution. Going to her bedroom she quickly undressed and put on her most attractive nightgown. Taking the bottle of strychnine from the drawer where she kept it she found that seven tablets remained. These she put in an envelope which she carefully hid in the drawer. The empty bottle and a glass half-filled with water she placed on the table by her bedside. Then she turned on all the electric lights and went to bed. When her husband returned from his walk she would assume a great drowsiness and would revive only after much effort on the part of Hobbs. Under the circumstances Mercita could not well believe that he would refuse her anything—certainly not a new dress.

* * * *

Mercita's bedroom was already filled with the morning sunshine when she was awakened by a loud knocking at her door. Before she was quite con-

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scious or had realized that the night had passed and that she had spent it alone, the door was thrown back and she saw the frightened face of her maid, and, in the doorway, standing behind the maid, the big heavy form of Doctor Brandt. The physician gently brushed aside the terror-stricken maid and going over to the bed took one of Mercita's hands in both of his own.

"Little girl," he said, "I've bad news for you. Try to be strong, won't you?"

"Bexley?" she whispered.

Brandt nodded.

"Dead?"

"I'm afraid so, Mercita. I don't believe it's wise or kind to hold back the truth."

Mercita stared at the physician with wide, frightened eyes.

"But how," she stammered, "how?"

"They found him in a little hotel downtown. It seems he took a room there late last night. He'd turned on the gas and had gone to sleep. Bexley didn't suffer, my dear, he didn't suffer at all."

For a few moments there was silence and then Mercita asked:

"Did he—did Bexley leave no word?"

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“Only a short note for me,” Brandt said; “just two lines scribbled on an envelope. He told me where I could find his life insurance papers and to see that you got the money.”

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CARRINGTON is a forlorn and dismal Virginia village which, years ago, several Southern railroads selected as a suitable place for a junction. At this dreary spot, day after day, night after night, carloads of weary passengers are dumped out of stuffy cars and are compelled to wait for trains that are invariably late. The resources of Carrington are limited to two fruit stands, a drug-store and the Central Hotel, which in all ways resembles the pictures in the newspapers marked "where the murder took place." Once there was the Altmont Inn—a large, commodious resort perched on a prettily wooded hill just across the railroad tracks from the station.

It was my sad fate to watch the Altmont Inn pass from a second-class, fairly successful, summer hotel to a weather-beaten, decayed tavern fit neither for man nor beast. I knew it in its palmy days, when one could sit in a rocking chair on the broad piazza

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and watch the boarders dancing the waltz and two-step to the music of a wheezing violin and a tinkling piano, and I was also present the night that Johnnie Hardwick, the night-clerk, sang its swan song. I had gone to the Inn that night, as was my custom whenever I visited Carrington, and, in the dirty, ill-lighted office, had found, with much difficulty, a sheet of note-paper sufficiently clean of ink stains on which to write a letter. When I had finished I took the letter to the desk and found Hardwick waiting for me with a two-cent stamp in his hand. He was a sallow-faced youth, not more than twenty-five years old, I should think, and he had big, round, blue eyes and a manner that made you like the boy even if you mistrusted him.

"I knew you were going to ask if I had a two-cent stamp," he said, and his thin, anemic lips wavered into a wholly charming smile.

"Why?" I asked.

He took my pennies and, ignoring the rusty cash register, dropped them in the pocket of his very old and worn coat.

"Why," he repeated, "because that's the only kind of guests we have here now, and, Bo, I'll let you in on a secret—there ain't much profit in stamps."

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"All in, eh?" I suggested, and glanced about the deserted, dust-begrimed office.

"Yep," Johnnie laughed, "we're all in. The boss is drunk in the kitchen and the old woman is trying to put her six squalling brats to bed in the bridal suite, and the gas company has turned off the gas. Kerosene is pretty low, too, and we can't get credit at the store."

He leaned up against the counter and, for a moment, stared idly at the fly-specked chandelier that hung over his head, and then once more his lips broke into the same charming, irresponsible smile. "I don't exactly know why we keep open any more, except the boss is too tight to give the orders to close. I suppose you're waiting for the train to God's country."

"I'm going to New York," I said, "if that's what you mean."

"That's what I mean—God's country, the big puddle, the old town. I used to work there—night-clerk at the Rosemont. You know, West Forty-fifth, between the Hippodrome and the Main Alley." He straightened his lithe, well-knit figure, pursed his lips and, with an expression of real seriousness in his eyes, looked fairly into mine and slowly shook his head.

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It was quite evident that the former night-clerk of the Rosemont keenly regretted the evil days that had befallen him and the ignominy of his present surroundings.

"Did you ever know Violet Doane?" he asked with a sudden and renewed interest, "or Mildred De Long or Vera Morris?"

I shook my head.

"No," he said, and he was plainly disappointed at my limited acquaintance. "They all used to stop at the Rosemont. Nice girls—you know, kind of free and no formality about 'em. Violet Doane's with the Follies this year. I saw her picture in the *Sunday Telegraph*. Nice girl, Violet, and a good friend of mine. Good times, those!"

"Why did you leave and come to such a forsaken place as this?" I asked.

Hardwick glanced up at me as suddenly and as sharply as if I had struck him, and when he answered me he spoke slowly and with much deliberation, which was not at all his way.

"They fired me," he said, "because they complained I was too fresh with the lady guests; but you know those girls are naturally friendly. It's their way, and I never heard yet of a night-clerk

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on Forty-fifth Street being a Saint Anthony. It's not the way they play the part, but I got fired all right. Then I drifted around New York for a while doing any old job. I was usher at Miner's Eighth Avenue, and I worked in Delaney's pool-room for a few months, and then my health went bad and—" His voice trailed off to a whisper, and, then, he seemed to pull himself together again and he went on. "Then the Doc said I had to get out, and an old friend I knew in the hotel business told me of this job and I came right down. I've been here ever since. It was Violet Doane, I was speaking about to you, that staked me to the railroad fare and got me some nice clothes and things."

He looked down at the seedy, threadbare suit he wore and, then, glancing at me, smiled a grim, mirthless smile and tossed his chin in the air. "Times is," he said, "and times was, eh! Now if that old man out there in the kitchen ever comes to, I'll be fired again, and when I walk out of that door I'll have the clothes I've got on my back and the stars over my head, and nothing between."

"I've just come from the Madison Springs, where I have been going every summer for twenty years," I said. "The assistant-clerk over there left yester-

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day. I heard the day-clerk speaking about it this afternoon. Why don't you try for that job?"

A sudden light flashed up in the boy's eyes and then vanished as quickly as it had come. "No use," he said. "I know about that Madison Springs Hotel. It's a nice, old, respectable place and they'd want good references, and I haven't got 'em. It would have been a great chance, though, a great chance." And then the light once more flared up in the blue eyes and his whole manner became alert and eager. Even before he spoke the words I was sorry, for I knew what he was going to say and I knew that I had made a mistake ever to have mentioned the vacancy at the Madison Springs. As Hardwick had said, it *was* an old, respectable place, dignified and conservative, and the last hotel to harbor this boy graduate from the Tenderloin. I think he knew quite well the thought that was in my mind, for he seized me eagerly by the arm, and with his big eyes he fairly begged me to help him.

"You wouldn't do it," he whispered, "would you? Not after all I've told you about the Rosemont and my being an usher, and working in the poolroom, and Violet Doane and all that. Of course you wouldn't. But you don't know what a chance like

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that would be for me. It would give me another start. The Doc told me I'd die if I went back to the big town, and I'm broke and I'm going to be thrown out. I tell you I'll starve. For God's sake, mister, whatever your name is, please say a good word for me. I'll promise you I'll behave. I promise you. Please give me a chance." There was a telephone on the desk, and he suddenly pushed it toward me. "Please, please," he begged.

In the pathetic figure before me there was nothing at all of the swaggering, smiling ex-clerk of the Rosemont. Just a poor, sick boy, who saw the hope of a roof to cover him and a chance to start life again in a better, decenter way, and for the moment I knew that he believed that if he were given the chance that he could and would make good.

In five minutes it was all over, and such a mistake as I had made on account of my sympathy for the boy had been made beyond recall. On my recommendation as to his ability and moral character, Johnnie Hardwick had been promised the position of under-clerk at the Madison Springs, and in another five minutes we had both left the Altmont Inn, and both of us for the last time.

A month later when I returned to the Madison

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Springs Johnnie Hardwick was the first to greet me. But it was a very different Johnnie Hardwick from the one I had left that night at Carrington. The blue eyes shone clear, his face looked less like putty, and the shadows and the lines put there by dissipation and the lack of healthy food had almost disappeared. The seedy, gray suit had given way to a natty blue serge coat and a pair of carefully creased white flannels. His joy at seeing me was apparently real, and after he had gripped my hand he stepped back from the desk to show me the beauty of his raiment.

"Pretty nifty, eh?" he laughed. "I wish some of those ginks on Broadway that had me for down and out could see me now." He pushed the register toward me and as he gave me a pen he turned his hand so that the sunlight that streamed in through the office window fell full on a valuable diamond ring. "A little souvenir from one of the lady guests," he explained with evident pride. "Pretty little thing, isn't it?"

"Why, Hardwick," I protested, "you shouldn't be taking rings from the women guests. You know you promised to be good."

Johnnie fairly laughed aloud. "I'm good, all right.

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I've played the innocent kid as if I'd been trained for it by Belasco. They're all crazy about me. The dame that gave me that ring was older than the mountains around here, and she spent two hours every morning hanging over the desk telling me how cute her grandchildren were. She wanted to adopt me, but I compromised on the ring." He leaned toward me and his voice fell to a whisper. "And I tell you, Bo, it was coming to me. Those comic sayings of the grandchildren was pretty poor comedy and awful old stuff."

For the time further conversation was impossible, as one of the women guests came to inquire about some picture postal-cards and, in his desire to serve the newcomer, Johnnie apparently forgot my existence entirely. Half an hour later, when I returned from breakfast, I found at least half a dozen of the prettiest girls at the Springs hanging over the desk and chatting and laughing merrily with my protégé. All that I learned later that day and night convinced me that Hardwick had made a distinct niche for himself in the social life of the Springs. To the younger set of girls he was a sort of Bunthorne in flannels; the older women liked him for his ever-ready courtesy, and the men, although they probably un-

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derstood him, found his glib tongue amusing and his eager, fever-like readiness to join in anything and everything that was going on not only interesting but often useful.

At some period in his murky past Johnnie must have been an ash-lot ball-player, because he was promptly installed as the regular catcher of the hotel nine, and largely through his efforts the team became the champions of the valley. He had also learned to play a fair beginner's game of golf, and he was always ready to join a riding party and take a chance with any horse that was too decrepit or too spirited for the others to ride. It was, however, in the ballroom at night that Johnnie's star shone the brightest. Even if he had learned his dancing in Harlem casinos and the dance-halls of the East Side, he had learned his lesson well, and he played no favorites. He danced with the little girls of ten, and the twenty-year-old daughters of the northern millionnaires, and the elderly wives of the first families of Virginia, always with equal grace, and always with exactly the same amount of apparent abandon and tireless enthusiasm.

And, so, although Hardwick's English was not always polished and sometimes he forgot the dignity

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of his present surroundings, and when with the men occasionally relapsed into the lingo and tales of his hectic past, he was liked for his unquestioned accomplishments, a certain innate courtesy, and an everlasting desire to please.

As an instance of his cleverness he told me that he had always refused to play poker. "I'd queer myself with the mothers if I played with the boys," he explained, "and the old men know that no man should gamble with a hotel clerk's salary; but, believe me, I've watched 'em, and it hurts not to sit in when they ask you. It would be as easy as money from the old folks at home, only there'd be more of it." And, knowing Johnnie's former association with professional gamblers, I did not doubt that his confidence in his own prowess was well placed.

Of his ability to get on with men there was no question. It was only in his relationship with women that I feared for my protégé. That he had known many and that they had liked him better than most men I knew from episodes that he had told me of his past. Not that Hardwick boasted of his conquests, because he certainly never regarded himself in the light of a hero. He spoke of his love-affairs

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as he did of his hardships, or a big coup at the race-track, or a good fight in the back-room of a bar-room. They were just incidents in a short life which had been crowded with incidents. But that they had played the big and the dominating part in his life of adventure there could be no doubt whatever, although, to give him credit, I do not believe that Johnnie himself knew this.

I suppose it was out of gratitude for having obtained his present comfortable position for him that I was the only man at the Springs whom he chose to honor with his confidence. We were sitting alone late one night on the piazza, and I suppose it was the moonlight and the wonderful beauty of the silent fields and the ridges of endless hills that made him talk.

"I've got a lot to thank you for," he said; "a whole lot."

"Oh, I don't know," I protested. "I only got you the chance. It was up to you to make good, and you did it."

"Thank you," he said simply. "If you think I've made good, I don't care very much about the rest. But I'll tell you it hasn't always been so easy to keep going, and to bluff, and to tell 'em just enough

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to keep 'em laughing and not quite enough to get thrown out. And these dames up here . . .”

“The women guests,” I suggested.

“Yes, dames, skirts . . . you know. I never was by way of meeting real swells before.”

“Do you like the change?” I asked.

Hardwick smiled and shook his head.

“Why, yes, of course, but I can’t quite make 'em out. Sometimes they’re so like the other women I’ve known. Do you suppose all women are alike in some ways?”

But before I could answer him he asked suddenly: “Do you know Margaret Warren? Her mother runs the boarding-house at Jackson’s Farm.”

I knew Jackson’s Farm as a sort of refined road-house where the people from the Madison Springs went for fried chicken and waffle suppers. For many years I had enjoyed a speaking acquaintance with the Widow Warren and had seen her daughter Margaret grow from a delicate child to a healthy, rosy-cheeked country girl of eighteen.

“Yes,” I said. “Why?”

A slight color came into Johnnie’s gray face, and I suppose in any other face it would have been a blush.

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"Why," he repeated; "I don't know, except I think she's a wonder. She's not like the rest. . . . She's different, all right."

"I'm afraid I don't know Margaret very well," I said, and wondered why, of all the women Hardwick had met that summer, he should pick out the daughter of the lady who ran the boarding-house at Jackson's Farm. In all ways she seemed the antithesis of the girl that would attract him. Simple and unsophisticated, I knew that in case she liked Johnnie she would be as putty in his hands. It was just a question as to the angle from which he regarded her.

"Have you seen much of her?" I asked.

"Not a great deal," he said. "She never comes to the hotel here, and it's a good two-mile walk to the Farm. I see her when I go there with parties for dinner—she waits on the table generally. And I've been there by myself several times and had a couple of walks and talks with her, and once we went for a long ride to Mason's Crossroads. Gee, but how that kid can ride! She calls me Othello, because I tell her of all the strange places I've seen and the crazy things I've done."

"All?" I asked.

Johnnie grinned foolishly and shook his head.

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"No, not exactly. I only hand her the expurgated copy. She wouldn't know what I was talking about if I told her the whole truth and nothing but the truth. She's the finest bit of 'calico' I ever met with."

And by the manner of his saying it I knew that Margaret—that is, so far as Johnnie Hardwick was concerned—was in safe hands.

If I had any doubts on the question the unhappy incident that occurred a week later would have completely dispelled them. A large crowd from the hotel had gone over to Jackson's Farm for supper, and Johnnie and I were included in the party. As usual, Margaret waited on the table, and I could not see that Hardwick took any particular notice of the girl, or that she was any more assiduous in her attentions to him than she was to the other guests. But when supper was over and the rest of the party had gone to the sitting-room to dance, I missed the clerk and took it for granted that he had wandered off somewhere with Margaret. It was a particularly lively party that night and the scene in the sitting-room when the dancing was at its height was joyous in the extreme. As there were no drinks sold at Jackson's Farm the guests brought their own bot-

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tled goods with them, and sometimes—and I am afraid that this was one of those times—they brought too many. Several of the men were particularly gay, but until the time that Johnnie and Margaret made their appearance there had been nothing but a good deal of noise and a general display of youthful hilarity and spirits. Margaret remained in the doorway, while Johnnie had moved a few feet away from her to speak to a group of girls who were resting from the very arduous dancing. Tommy Wilson, who was the most befuddled of the young men of the party, caught sight of the pretty country girl standing in the doorway and, although at the time he was dancing with one of the girls from the Springs, he suddenly left his partner and made a rush for Margaret. Before she had time to know what was really happening, Wilson had seized her round the waist and, in an attempt to make her dance, was dragging her rather roughly about the floor. It was one of those occasions when a girl more knowing in the ways of the world would have accepted the situation and have humored her evidently too hilarious admirer. But Margaret lacked the poise and the tact of a girl more used to the ways of the world in which she suddenly found herself. With a

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purely primitive instinct she believed that she was being insulted, turned scarlet with rage and mortification, and made violent and entirely futile efforts to free herself from her unwelcome partner. Fearing what would happen and, as it came to pass, exactly what did happen, I started to mildly interfere. But I was far across the room, and long before I could reach the struggling girl Johnnie Hardwick had rushed to her rescue. In two bounds he had reached the man's side and, with the blind, ungovernable rage that he had acquired years before in his gutter life, he swung his right to the point of Wilson's jaw. As the noise of the blow echoed through the silent room, filled with its now thoroughly terrified guests, Wilson uttered a half-articulate cry, his strong broad frame crumpled and, sliding through Margaret's arms, fell to the floor an unconscious, helpless mass.

Never had I seen a cleaner cut piece of work nor better done, but I was sorry. Deserved it was, no doubt, but the same result might have been gained in a more diplomatic and peaceful way and in a manner that would have portended less sure disaster to Johnnie Hardwick. The Wilsons had been visitors at the Springs for many years, were rich, their wishes went

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far, and Tommy Wilson was neither a generous foe nor a man who easily forgot. Some of the women led Margaret, weeping hysterically, from the scene of the disaster, while the men threw water in Wilson's face, poured brandy through his drawn, parched lips, and gradually brought him back to semiconsciousness. The only one who did not try to assist was Johnnie, who stood next to me, on the edge of the crowd and, with folded arms and his face gone quite white with rage, looked down on his slowly reviving victim.

"The rat," he whispered to me through his clenched teeth. "Did you see how the bully toppled after the first crack?"

The boy's pale lips wavered into an ugly smile and his whole look was that of a fighting terrier. "Did you notice that uppercut I handed him?" he snarled. "It was a sweet wallop for sure. Teddy Burns taught me that when we both ran with the Doonin gang. It's a great blow when you got 'em ready for the count, and it's good, too, for drunken men who haven't got no more sense than to insult innocent girls."

I took Johnnie by the arm, and after he had stopped to turn one more malicious glance at the

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man on the floor, he allowed me to lead him unresisting from the room. The piazza was filled with little groups of excited girls and women eagerly whispering about the fight, and so Hardwick and I walked out on the lawn and sat down on a bench that overlooked the meadows down in the valley and the endless hills all bathed in the silver moonlight. For some time there was silence between us. I lighted a cigar and Johnnie sat with his hands between his knees, his palms pressed closely together, and his unseeing eyes fixed on the undulating ridges of the distant mountains.

"What are you going to do about it?" I asked at last.

Johnnie glanced at me, and in the moonlight I could see that the look of rage had cleared from his face and in a feeble way he tried to smile.

"Do," he said. "Why, what can I do but get out? What chance has a hotel clerk got against that young cub with all his money and his family and friends behind him?"

"The management might back you up," I suggested. "From all you say they have treated you very well over there."

But Johnnie only shook his head and continued

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to gaze across the valley. "That's just it," he said. "They've treated me so darned well that I don't want to put them in wrong. That blackguard has my goat all right and I've got to get out." For a moment he was silent again and when I glanced at the pale, putty face I saw that the lips were pressed into a hard, straight line, and the big, blue eyes were half closed and looked very tired and misty. He laid his hand on my knee and when he spoke there was a catch in his voice and it scarcely rose above a whisper.

After all, Johnnie was only a boy in years and almost a stranger to this better, sweeter kind of life. "It's pretty tough, Bo," he said; "I tell you, it's pretty tough. Just when things seemed to be coming my way and I was getting on, and mixing with white folks, and living decent. Then the joker in the pack turns up like it did to-night and I see red and forget I'm not back with the Doonin gang fighting the Cooley crowd. And it's a funny thing, but all my troubles seem to come from women—good women and bad women—but always women."

With the suggestion of a sigh and a shrug of his shoulders he got up, stretched his arms above his

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head and turned to look toward the piazza of the farmhouse.

"Wilson's all right again," he said. "He's sitting up there on the porch with a lot of girls bathing his head."

He started to walk away and, then, turning back, in an awkward, shy sort of way, held out his hand toward me.

"I'm obliged to you," he said, "for looking after me to-night. I owe you a lot one way or another, and I'm sorry I didn't make good."

I tried to say something, but by way of protest he threw up his hand.

"That's all right, I understand," he said. "And I wish you'd tell them up there that I've taken the runabout and am going to drive back alone. I brought young Morris over with me, but there's plenty of room for him in one of the big carriages. Good-night."

He swung abruptly on his heel and I watched him slowly crossing the lawn on his way to the stables. His head was held high and his shoulders thrown back, I imagine because he knew that the crowd on the porch could easily see him in the moonlight and he wanted to appear to be independent of them and

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not to care. But I knew that he cared more than Johnnie Hardwick had the language to tell how much he cared, and that the silent figure slowly crossing the moonlit lawn was the most unhappy, lonely soul in the whole world.

When I came down to breakfast the following morning I found Johnnie all packed and ready for his departure.

"I resigned before they had a chance to fire me," he laughed. "I telephoned to Jackson's Farm this morning and Mrs. Warren says she'll take me in over there. I'm not broke, you see, so I'm going to the Farm and sit in front of the office desk for a while instead of standing behind it. The old lady's all for me for knocking out Wilson last night and she's going to give me rates. It's an ill wind that blows nobody—not even poor little Johnnie Hardwick—good, eh?"

With a very small capital and no plans or prospects for the future, but his spirits and his flippant gaiety apparently entirely restored, Johnnie left the Madison Springs. With a cheer of farewell and good luck a few of us started him on his way to Jackson's Farm and to his new life as a paying boarder. But I felt instinctively that the new life would not

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prove a success, and my instincts on this occasion proved entirely correct.

Twice during the following week I saw him and on both occasions he was with Margaret. Once I met them driving along a wood road in Margaret's runabout, and the other time I found them sitting on a fallen tree near the lane that led to the Farm. Johnnie was evidently telling the girl some marvellous adventure from the past, for she was listening to him with the most rapt attention, but when I called to them they jumped up from the log and came running to meet me like a couple of happy children. For a few minutes we stood talking and laughing at the side of the road. Johnnie told me that although his funds were almost gone, he was so pleased with his present life that he intended to become a permanent paying guest at Mrs. Warren's, and Margaret assured me that Johnnie, although a boarder, did most of the work and was the greatest asset Jackson's Farm had ever known. When I left them I was quite sure that my fears as to the success of Hardwick's life at the Farm were groundless, and I even dared to hope that some day he would marry Margaret and settle down as the real manager of a real roadhouse. But again my best wishes for

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Johnnie's welfare went wrong, and it was certainly through no fault of his present life, even if it were of his somewhat lurid past.

Two days after I had met Johnnie and Margaret by the roadside I was greatly surprised to receive a visit from Mrs. Warren. For many years I had known Mrs. Warren as the proprietress of Jackson's Farm and as a sweet, kindly, well-born lady who had been forced by reduced circumstances to run a road-house, but hitherto I had never enjoyed anything approaching her confidence. That she had learned through Johnnie himself or through others that the young man was by way of being a protégé of mine and that the present visit was in some way connected with him I had no doubt whatever. It took a long time for the good lady to tell her story, and it was not told without considerable lamentation and many tears. In the short time that he had known her Johnnie had evidently endeared himself to the old lady, as he did to all women of all ages. But whether it was through her own ingenuousness or Johnnie's failure to speak freely of all of his past, Mrs. Warren had apparently formed an entirely erroneous idea of the young man's early life. In any case it was certainly the very last word in hard luck stories.

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It seemed that on the previous evening an automobile party from New York, who were turning a protracted tour of the South into one continuous joy-ride, had stopped for dinner and the night at Jackson's Farm. Whether the two ladies of the party were Violet Doane or Mildred De Long or any of the other former friends of Hardwick whom he knew when he was at the Rosemont I do not know, but that they were very beautiful ladies and very gay and very old friends of Johnnie there could be no doubt whatever. According to Mrs. Warren, no sooner had the two young women alighted from the automobile and recognized her favorite guest than the echoes of their cheers of delight and the endearing names they called him could be heard reverberating from mountain to mountain, up and down the entire length of the valley.

"Pretty girls both of them, *very* pretty girls," Mrs. Warren admitted, drawing her slight figure very taut, "but my belief is that they were, if you will pardon the expression, scarlet women. Being such old friends of Mr. Hardwick I couldn't very well refuse them board and lodging for the night, but the way they carried on was something scandalous. Mr. Hardwick, I must say, behaved very

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well, and didn't want to have dinner with them, but they would have it their own way. We've had some pretty gay parties at the Farm, as you know, but never such a noisy one as that one last night. They got away this morning, I'm happy to say, but what I came to see you about is Mr. Hardwick."

I tried to look sympathetic and expressed great faith in Johnnie's nobility of character, but I knew that so far as Jackson's Farm was concerned his fate was sealed.

"I wouldn't care for myself," the good lady went on tearfully, "but I don't think that any young man with friends like that is a fit companion for my Margaret. And the worst of it is Margaret likes him. The girl is sort of fascinated by his city ways and she won't have anything more to do with any of the boys in the valley."

"But what can I possibly do?" I asked.

"You must ask him to go away," Mrs. Warren begged. "If I did it Margaret would never speak to me again. Young girls can't understand that a mother is only trying to do what is best for them. Please, please ask him to go away."

The old lady buried her face in her hands and her frail shoulders shook in a series of long, low sobs.

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Once more it seemed that Hardwick must be starting on his way and once more for the same old reason. My conscience told me that Mrs. Warren was probably right and, so, with great reluctance, I promised to grant her request.

That afternoon I drove over to the Farm and once more Johnnie and I sat on the lawn and talked a very sincere heart-to-heart talk. There was no moonlight now, but the soft, cool air was filled with the wonderful golden glow of the late summer afternoon. Before us lay the valley, rich in its waving cornfields and velvety green pasture meadows, and, far beyond, the protecting hills rising to meet the clear blue sky. Friendly robins were hopping and chirping about us on the lawn; we could see the cows grazing in the meadows and the swarms of white chickens at the chicken farm down the hill, near the well-kept, well-filled barns; and we could hear the dogs baying to be let loose from the stables. Here was surely a scene of peace and plenty which was not easy to ask a man to leave for any odd job that might await him beyond the hills that shut in this restful valley from the turmoil of the big world outside.

I rather imagine that Johnnie had at once guessed

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the object of my mission, for he listened to my words in silence and without a protest of any kind whatever. When I had finished he looked up at me as a dog might look at the master who had struck him. He got up from the bench and, with his hands resting on his hips, looked slowly about him—at the house, and at the stables, and at the well-tilled fields, and at the rolling meadows and the wooded hills. Several times his lips parted as if he were going to say something, but each time the words seemed to die in his parched throat.

“I’m terribly sorry, Johnnie,” I said at last, knowing perfectly well how inadequate anything I could say must be to the boy; “is there nothing I can do?”

“Yes,” he said. “You can take me and my suitcase over to the station. I’d just about have time to catch the evening train. It won’t take me but a few minutes to pack.”

I knew that he bade good-bye to Mrs. Warren, but I think that Margaret must have been away from the farm at the moment, because from something he said I’m quite sure that he did not see her again. In almost complete silence we drove down the hill, out the gate, and along the shady road that led to the sta-

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tion. When we had reached our destination there was still half an hour before Johnnie's train left for Carrington, but he insisted that I should not wait, but return at once to the Springs. I offered to loan him some money, but he smiled and shook his head.

"No, thank you," he said. "I've got a little something left from my wages, and besides, I'm a tramp clerk, and we swell hoboes never borrow."

"Have you any plans?" I asked.

Again he shook his head and smiled the same mirthless smile.

"No, nothing for the present," he said. "Some time, if I ever really make good, I'd like to go back there," and he nodded in the direction of the farm. "I think you'd better be going now," he added, "you'll be late for supper. Thank you for all you've done, and if you don't mind I'll look you up when I get back to the big town."

I gave him my address and we shook hands and as I drove away I glanced back and saw the boy sitting on his valise on the deserted platform waiting for the train that was to carry him somewhere, anywhere, to a new land of adventure.

A year or more elapsed before Hardwick kept his promise to look me up in the big town, although,

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during the interval, I heard of him once and directly from him several times. A man I knew and who was staying at Madison Springs when Johnnie was there saw him the following winter in Havana. He met him at a masquerade ball where the women, at least, were not of the great world of society, and my friend assured me that Hardwick was apparently the life of the party and the unquestioned beau of the ball. My correspondence with him was entirely by picture postal-cards and altogether one-sided, as he never gave me any address to which I could write him. The first card arrived soon after my return to New York and came from Atlanta, which showed that he had taken a southern course after leaving Virginia. At spasmodic intervals I afterward heard from him from Macon, New Orleans, Santiago and Panama. Just some foolish picture-cards which he thought would appeal to my sense of humor, and a few scribbled words of good wishes, but nothing of himself or of his doings. About Christmas-time I received the last message from him. It came in the form of a picture of a holly wreath, and in the centre was inscribed a very bad poem wishing me good cheer and the blessings of the Yuletide season.

Then followed almost six months of silence and

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I thought that Johnnie had forgotten me entirely, but one day in the early summer he came to pay me his long-promised visit. In his easy, exuberant way it was the Johnnie of old, but in other ways there was a great change. To the ever-confiding blue eyes had been added a look of seriousness, and his manner was more alert and his mind even more active than before. From the rambling, disjointed story he told me it was evident that through no particular effort of his own, good fortune, or at least the promise of it, had come his way. It was also apparent that having once tasted the fruits of business success, he had given the same terrier-like interest to it that he had formerly devoted to amusing himself. His fortunes dated from an all-night session with a couple of prospectors in the back-room of a hotel in Para, where he was holding his old position of night-clerk. The prospectors, evidently charmed by Hardwick's manner, and Johnnie, entranced by the tales of the great wealth that lay hidden in the Brazilian hills, decided to pool their interests, and the next morning Hardwick gave up his certain wage as a hotel clerk for the very uncertain fortunes of the gold-digger. That he and his partners had eventually discovered and taken over mines of great value Johnnie believed

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implicitly, but, like most prospectors, they had lacked the means to operate them and their earnings had so far been only in proportion to their capital. But that there had been earnings there could be no doubt, for Johnnie had plenty of money on which to live in great splendor at the Waldorf, and he wore jeweled rings of real value on nearly every finger of both hands. Of the three partners, he told me that he had been judged the one with the glibbest tongue and the most convincing manner, and, therefore, had been chosen to come to New York to raise the money necessary to open up the hidden treasures of the Brazilian mines.

“But to whom are you going to look for your capital?” I asked a little incredulously.

“To my friends,” Johnnie laughed. “You didn’t know I had friends, did you? But I have—the same friends who let me starve. Rich gamblers, and sporting men, and crooked brokers who wouldn’t give me the price of a sandwich when I was on my uppers, but who would back me for millions if I could show them a gambler’s chance to make a thousand per cent. And that’s just what I can show them—a gambler’s chance. Long shots, perhaps, but I’ve got stable-tips in the way of ore samples that’ll

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make 'em come across with the coin. But, between you and me, they're not long-shots—they're sure things with a short price against every one of them."

"Then if they are such sure things," I asked, "why not let me in on them?"

But Johnnie only smiled and shook his head. "No, not you," he said. "You're too respectable for this game. We may have the cards, but the dealers are all crooked, every one of us, and we're going to get the big end every time. It's a 'public be damned' game if there ever was one. Besides, if I strike it rich, and it's dollars to pennies that in six months I'll have my millions and be back here with bells on, then I'll give you all you can use. When I was down and out you treated me white, and Johnnie Hardwick, the night-clerk, never forgets."

With this conciliatory but somewhat theatrical speech (for Johnnie loved melodrama) he left me, and I did not see him again for several weeks. Then it was only for a brief call to say good-bye and to tell me that he had raised the money and was leaving the next day on his way to Rio.

Another six months of silence, and, then, when

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winter had set in and the town had reached the season of its greatest gaiety, Johnnie came marching home, and, in his own words, he came back with bells on. Whether the confiding public had been fleeced of its money by three wise and perhaps rather unscrupulous young men, or whether the mines were of the great value the young men had contended they were, I do not know. But that Johnnie had made good his threat to come into his millions I have no doubt whatever, because he offered to loan or to give me several of them.

If Johnnie had grown older by a couple of years since I had first met him, he was just as young in his enthusiasm for life, and he was still the genial night-clerk, but now the night-clerk off for a holiday with a few coins to jangle in his pocket. His clothes were as conspicuous as were his rings and his countless stick pins. He wore a sealskin coat to all the musical comedies and dropped it ostentatiously on the floor as if it had been a linen duster. The head-waiters of the smarter restaurants soon came to recognize him as one of their best-known and best-paying patrons. He gave supper parties in private rooms to beautiful show girls, and the suppers were the envy of all Broadway, especially that part of it

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that was not invited. He established himself in the finest of bachelor apartments and hung the silk-brocaded walls with fearful and expensive oil-paintings. Heavy velvet curtains and portières were draped about in most luxurious profusion, and the rooms were filled with the most awful collection of junk ever unloaded by unscrupulous art dealers on a well-meaning but ignorant patron. If New York offered any amusement that money could buy and of which Johnnie did not avail himself to the fullest extent, then I know nothing of the pleasures of the town.

Every few weeks he would drop in at my rooms and, in a somewhat guarded way, tell me of his joyous life and of his happiness at the fulfilment of his every whim in a town where he had once been so poor and downtrodden. It was several months after his triumphant return, and, on this particular occasion, the talk had taken a somewhat serious turn. I don't really know how it happened, unless it was that spring was in the air, and it had been a rather strenuous winter, and one's mind naturally turned to the woods and running waters and green fields.

"But, Johnnie," I protested, after he had told me of some particularly wild party that he had given

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the night before, "you can't go on like this forever. You'll break up. Why don't you mix things a bit and get out of town for awhile and try some sort of regular exercise. Buy a place in the country near here and live a little more sensibly. You'll want to settle down some of these days and then it will be fine to have a home all ready for you."

For a moment he hesitated and then looked up at me a little shyly, and as if he were somewhat ashamed of what he had done.

"I know what you mean," he said. "I understand. It was just that I wanted to have my fling first. I'd been waiting for a regular fling and wishing for it all of my life, and when the chance came I grabbed it and—well, in a way, I liked it, too. But, good Lord, I know what you mean. I've bought a piece of ground already, just off Riverside Drive, and I'm going to build the prettiest house you ever saw. I wanted to have it a sort of castle effect, but when the architect fellow had looked over the ground and had sized me up, he said I didn't want no castle but a pure marble building with no trimmings at all. He said that when it was all finished and people would compare it to the Dutch castles and Italian palaces in the neighborhood my place would look

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like a snowflake on a dumping ground. That's just what he said, and they tell me he's a great swell at his trade. I've got the plans now and we'll break ground pretty soon."

He stopped talking and glanced at me for my approval, and, seeing that he had it, went on again. "And when I get the marble shack all up and fixed inside and running just about right, then I'm going after the place in the country you're talking about. But I can tell you it won't be around here, nor a bit like it. I know the place and it's a long, long jump from this gay old town, a long jump. Just because I've been sort of hitting it up along Broadway since I got back, you mustn't think that the white lights have blinded me. I had the home in the country and all that doped out long ago, and it's all coming in its own good time."

I think "its own good time" must have come sooner than Johnnie expected, because a week later he called on me, but as I was out he scribbled the following words on his card: "Have been thinking over what you said and am going to Virginia to-night. If I have good news I'll wire—Johnnie."

For the next few days I waited for a message from Jackson's Farm, but it did not come, and al-

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most a month had passed before I again got news from Johnnie. It arrived in the form of a brief note asking me to come to see him at his rooms late the following afternoon as he had something of importance to show me.

I found him standing in front of the fireplace in his sitting-room surrounded by all the gorgeousness that money and a lack of good taste could devise. A big golden lamp in one corner gave out a little light and the last faint rays of the setting sun filtered through the open windows, but the room was quite dark and, where Johnnie stood in the shadow of the fireless fireplace, I could not at first tell from his face whether the news he had brought back from Virginia was good news or bad news.

"Hello," I cried, trying to be as cheerful as I could, "when did you get back to town?"

He left the fireplace and, crossing the room, gripped the hand I held out to him in both of his own. From the tightness of the grip and a certain subdued expression in the blue eyes I knew that the news was bad news.

"I got back to town," he said, with a feeble effort to smile, two days after I left it. Did you ever know a young man down there named Hugh Billings?"

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For answer I shook my head.

"Well," Johnnie went on, "he has a farm a little way up the valley from Mrs. Warren's. He and Margaret got married about a month ago. I found them all settled down at Jackson's Farm. Mrs. Warren's getting pretty old, so he's to run the place for her."

For lack of something more adequate, I said: "I'm sorry, Johnnie. I'm sorry that Margaret didn't wait."

"I never asked her to wait," he said very simply. "I took a gambler's chance. Perhaps if I hadn't wasted my time fooling around here with these skirts for the last few months it might have been different. But I don't know that."

He shrugged his shoulders and, walking to the window, clasped his hands behind his back and stood looking out on the pink glow of the dying day. For some moments he remained there, and then I went over to where he stood and laid my hand on his shoulder.

"Why didn't you let me know before?" I asked. "You've been here nearly a month."

He turned back to the room and, as if to bring

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himself back to the consciousness of his surroundings, slightly shook his shoulders.

"I had some plans I wanted to show you," he said, and nodded his head toward the centre-table which was littered with many blue-prints. "But I didn't want you to know anything about it until I had things settled. Sit down, won't you?"

I sat down in a big armchair near the hearth and Johnnie returned to his former stand before the fireplace.

"I don't speak the English language very well," he began, "but there are two words in it that I always had a great hankering for. One was home and the other was motherhood."

"Both fine words," I interrupted.

"I suppose the reason I liked them," Johnnie went on, "was because I never had a home and the kind of women I have known looked at motherhood with about as much pleasure as they would at a case of smallpox. I got to thinking on the train on my way back from Virginia and I figured it out about like this. I says what possible use is that marble palace uptown going to be to me—that is, as things have turned out. I've got these rooms and, if I do

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say it, they're good enough for any bachelor, aren't they?"

I promptly admitted that they were.

"They're roomy," Johnnie went on, "and they're cozy, and all the girls and boys are crazy about them. So I says, go ahead with the palace uptown, but instead of fixing it up inside as a home for me and—well, I'll switch it to a home for women that are going to bring children into the world."

"A maternity hospital," I suggested.

Johnnie nodded. "Yes, that's what the doctors who are getting it up for me wanted to call it, but I says 'No, it's going to be called Saint Margaret's Home.' They wanted to call it Saint Margaret's Hospital or just Saint Margaret's, but I says Saint Margaret's Home, or nothing. It's to be pretty small, but it's to be the greatest thing of its kind in the world. It's going to be a snowflake on a dumping ground for fair, and it's going to be for poor mothers and poor mothers only. And when the children are born they'll have everything around 'em that money can buy, and, as soon as their eyes are open, the first thing they'll get a flash of will be nice white beds and pretty nurses in white caps and aprons. They can look out of the windows and

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see the river, and the ships sailing by, and the men-of-war that are always lying at anchor up there, and the kids can hear them shooting off their cannon, too, when the admirals salute the mayor. And if that ain't a home then I don't know what is. I tell you I haven't forgotten what the place looked like that I was born in, and where my mother died just from lack of fresh air, and sunlight, and a little care, and something good to eat. Even if the babies do have to leave the place pretty soon to make room for other mothers and babies, it'll help their self-respect a lot; they can always go back to that pretty marble house and point it out and say that's the home where I was born, and they needn't be ashamed."

"And Margaret," I asked, "have you told her yet?"

Johnnie looked at me in the old, shy way he had sometimes when he was telling me what was really in his heart, and shook his head.

"No," he said, a little reluctantly, "I don't think I'll tell Margaret."

"Why, Johnnie," I protested, "think how it would please her. That's a wonderful thing in a girl's life to have inspired an idea like that and to know that

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she is responsible for all the good and happiness that such a home is going to bring to all those mothers and little children."

But again Johnnie shook his head.

"It's hard for me to make you understand," he said, "because it's hard for me to explain anything I really feel. But to me it seems something like this. I don't believe any one woman ever cares for but one man, and it's the same with a man who really loves a woman. Margaret cared, and, the Lord knows, I cared, too, but I never told her then, and I don't want her ever to know if I can help it. It would only make us both unhappy. She can go on with her life down there in the old way, and I can live on here as I have been living. These rooms are all I'll need."

He glanced about at the velvet hangings and the bad paintings and vulgar ornaments. "I think these rooms are all right, don't you?"

"Why, yes, Johnnie," I lied, "I think they're fine."

"It seems to me," he added, speaking very slowly, "that the case of Margaret and me was just like two strangers meeting at a country crossroads, and having a friendly chat, and then each going their own way. It was all so simple and pleasant, down

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there at the farm and—so different. But that has nothing to do with my life now, just as hers has nothing to do with New York. I tell you, it's dead. It's a closed incident, as the saying goes." He glanced down at me and then at the open window through which there came the confused echoes of the roar and rumble of a great city.

"But it is sort of pleasant in a way," he went on, "to know that that chance meeting down there in that clean, decent country, with the fields and the mountains all around us, was the reason for that little white home uptown rising out of the muck and filth of this big, rotten city."

“THE PROFESSOR”

THE party began at Fabacher's restaurant and was given by Stacy Paget to the exceedingly beautiful and more or less talented Ivy Hettler. During the earlier part of that same evening Miss Hettler had graduated from the chorus to the soubrette part in "The Maid of Mirth," and she had taken this important step with a degree of success that, to the outsider at least, seemed to justify a modest celebration. However, there were several other girls of the company, who happened to be supping that night at Fabacher's, to whom Ivy Hettler's promotion was regarded not only as undeserved but in the light of an ordinary scandal. Furthermore, they did not hesitate to show their feelings by casting significant glances in the direction of Stacy Paget and the numerous bottles of champagne that he was opening in honor of his new soubrette.

Irene Earle, who was one of a large party sitting

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but a few tables distant, shut the metal lid of her beer mug with a vicious snap and shoved it halfway across the polished table.

“Just look at the way Ivy’s sipping her wine,” she sneered. “You’d think she was afraid the bubbles were going to bite her. There’s a fine soubrette for you—I *don’t* think. I know about eight of our girls who can sing and dance and read lines all around that kid. Of all——”

“What gets my goat,” Marie Le Moyne interrupted, “is that Ivy should have played the wide-eyed innocent child half the season and then copped out the manager. If it had been a chorus man or even the tenor, I wouldn’t have cared.”

Edna Clark rapped her beer mug on the table to attract the attention of a passing waiter, and glanced over her shoulder in the direction of the manager’s supper party.

“It’s a rotten shame, if you ask me,” she said, turning back her large bovine eyes to the men and women at her own table, “a rotten shame. Some of these days Stacy Paget’ll make a play for a girl who’s got a brother or a sweetheart with red blood in him, and then there’ll be one more good girl in the show business and one less manager.”

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The other women about the table, each according to her own moral viewpoint, shrugged their shoulders or nodded their approval, and then every one ordered more beer from the patient waiter.

In the natural course of events, and according to the most firmly established traditions of New Orleans sporting life, Irene Earle, Marie Le Moyne, Edna Clark, and the other girls from “The Maid of Mirth,” as well as the young men who were acting as their hosts, eventually left Fabacher’s in pursuit of the real entertainment of the night. Half a dozen taxicabs jolted them over the rough stone pavements and through the narrow, dimly lighted streets to the side door of the Oriental Café, where the already hilarious party of pleasure seekers was received with clamorous delight.

The back room of the Oriental was a little larger and a trifle cleaner than the other and less successful resorts of its kind in the neighborhood. The floor was bare, the maroon tinted walls were decorated with a few fly-specked prints of former gladiators of the roped arena or past equine heroes of the turf, and the centre of the low, smoke-begrimed ceiling was enlivened by a large and exceedingly crude painting of scarlet roses and amorous pink cupids.

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At the far end of the long, narrow room there was a small raised platform which served as a stage. On this there was an upright piano and a table, on which were placed a drum, a trombone, and several other sadly dilapidated instruments used by the performers when rendering “Alexander’s Ragtime Band” and other ballads of a similarly hilarious nature.

The three professional artists who were regularly employed by the management of the café were Eddie Windle, commonly known as “The Professor,” who played the accompaniments for the two other young men as well as for any artist in the audience who wished to contribute a song to the general gayety of the night. The two young men who sang professionally and who held the exclusive privilege of periodically passing the hat among their delighted auditors were the Allen Brothers, specimens of a wholly depraved type usually to be found about the sporting resorts of any large city. Both young men were always neatly dressed, brisk of manner, spoke a jargon of slang all of their own, and were wonderfully wise in knowing how to extract from the unworldly the greatest amount of money possible with the least personal effort. The difference between these two noisy, fatuous youths and the Professor

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is not easy to define, and yet there was a subtle difference which never failed to impress itself on any one who spent a night at the Oriental Café.

The Professor was quite as youthful as his fellow workers, and, from all appearances, just as knowing in the ways of the underworld in which he lived. But whether it was that he lacked the convivial spirits of the other two or was palpably short of physical charm, there can be no question that he was seldom asked to drink with a party in the audience, and was under no condition permitted by his brother artists to pass around the hat. He was a tall, spare young man, with slightly stooping shoulders, big gray eyes, and an unhappy, discontented look in them, which could be seen when he occasionally turned them toward the audience. Perhaps it was this or perhaps it was his blond hair parted neatly in the centre, and his pink and white coloring, and the weak, sensitive mouth from which there always hung a half-lighted cigarette, or perhaps again it was his shy and taciturn manner, but certainly one or all of these things combined to set him apart and cause the visitors to the Oriental to regard him as curiously out of place in his present surroundings.

But if the Professor's personality did not seem to

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belong to the place, he nevertheless occupied a most important part in its nightly programme. Not only did he play the accompaniments for the other artists, but at somewhat lengthy intervals throughout the night he contributed a song of an entirely different character from the noisy efforts of the Allen Brothers. These songs of the Professor were invariably sentimental, often pathetic, and their subjects were the deserted home, the dying soldier-hero, the wayward daughter, and particularly the aged mother. With what had been once an apparently good, if untrained, tenor voice, Eddie Windle, sitting at the piano, gazing up at the grimy ceiling, sang these doleful ditties, and it must be said to his credit that they were invariably received by the patrons of the Oriental with the most marked signs of approval. It may have been the highly moral sentiment of the songs, or it may have been the feeling with which he rendered their homely words, but certain it is that when the Professor sang “Her Hobo Son,” or “The Girl I Loved,” or “Dream Days,” or “Little Girlie Mine,” the audience was not only always respectfully silent, but during the very early hours of the morning frequently reduced to a state of maudlin tearfulness.

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Very much in the spirit of a sight-seeing or slumming party, Stacy Paget and his friends eventually arrived at the Oriental Café and were shown to a table not far from the little stage. The Allen Brothers were, for the third time that evening, rendering “The Raggiest Rag,” and while Eddie Windle remained at the piano the two brothers, accompanied by Irene Earle, Marie Le Moyne, and several other girls from “The Maid of Mirth” company were marching in single file between the tables, beating drums, blowing horns, or singing loudly as they continued on their joyous parade up and down the room. Eddie Windle was, as usual, gazing absently at a spot on the ceiling, just over the piano, and therefore failed to notice the arrival of the newcomers. But when Ivy Hettler first saw the Professor she turned quite white, and her soft, pretty hands suddenly gathered tightly about the thick stem of the as yet empty wineglass that stood before her. When the song was over, Windle swung slowly about on the piano stool and, with his usually taciturn and disinterested manner, gazed at the noisy crowd beating beer mugs on the tables and shouting uproariously for an encore. And then his glance shifted and his eyes met those of Ivy Hettler. If

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he recognized the girl no one would have known it, for his face remained the same meaningless pink and white mask. Once more he swung about on the piano stool, and, picking up his cigarette, lighted it and blew a series of gray wavering rings of smoke at the ceiling.

“Sing ‘The Village Green,’ Professor,” some one shouted, and another voice farther back in the hall called: “No, Eddie, make it ‘Dream Days.’”

By way of reply, the Professor played a few stray chords and then slowly turned his big gray eyes, and for a moment allowed them to rest on Ivy Hettler and Stacy Paget. The manager had indulged in the almost unknown luxury at the Oriental of ordering champagne, and the habitués did not wonder that the incident should have attracted the momentary attention of the piano player. The song which Eddie Windle played on this occasion was quite new to the Oriental’s audience and a new song by the Professor was always an event of no mean importance. It was a very simple song, largely recitative; the lyrics were ungrammatical and the meter was distinctly faulty. The whole thing was commonplace, even banal. The title of the ballad was “She’s Anyone’s Little Girlie Now but Mine,” and it was all

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about a boy and a girl who had grown up together in a little country town and had gone to school together and played together and fought their childish battles for each other. Then the boy went away to seek his fortune in the city, but she always remained his little girl. That is, she did until one night when he chanced to meet her under most unhappy conditions. Because it seems that she, too, having grown tired of the little town and of waiting for her sweetheart, had come to the big city. And then, after the meeting, according to the refrain of this homely tale, she was any one's little girl but his.

A complete and most flattering silence greeted the conclusion of the ballad. One of the girls from the district sniffed audibly, and Irene Earle fearlessly dabbed her moist eyes several times with a small lace handkerchief. Stacy Paget leaned his heavy body forward, and with his fat chin sunk between his palms and his elbows resting upon the table, gazed steadily at the Professor, who was again sitting idly at the piano and once more blowing cigarette rings at the dirty ceiling.

“Well, he got to me,” the manager muttered. “That may be cheap stuff, but it got under my vest all right.”

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With an ever ready eye to the main chance, the Allen Brothers were quick to take advantage of Windle's success and hurriedly began to pass around their hats among the audience. After the collection had been made, the brothers were joined by the Professor and they adjourned to the barroom to count their earnings. When the contributions had been dumped on the table, the first thing that caught the eyes of all the three men among the mass of dollar bills and silver was a small envelope.

Bud Allen, the elder of the brothers, picked it up and, having deftly felt the enclosure with his finger tips, whistled softly.

“Well, what do you think of that?” he gasped. “I saw the skirt that put that in and I thought it was a joke, but it ain't no joke—it's her pay envelope.” Raising the envelope to the light, he read aloud the name written across it: “Ivy Hettler.” Then he started to tear it open, but Eddie Windle suddenly shot out his hand.

“Don't you open that, Bud,” he whispered fiercely. “Don't you dare!”

Allen's hand closed tight about the prize.

“Don't open it!” he repeated. “Why, she's one of those girls from the show at the Dauphine. There

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must be twenty-five in it anyway. I guess you're crazy, ain't you, Eddie?"

Windle leaned far across the table, and in the Professor's eyes Bud Allen saw a light that he had never remembered to have seen there before.

"No," Windle said, speaking very quietly, "I'm not crazy. You take that envelope back and give it to the girl that put it in the hat, and do it *now*! Do you get me?"

With a reluctant shrug of his shoulders, Bud Allen got up from the table. "All right," he grumbled; "I guess it was that last song of yours that drew it anyhow." He interrupted himself with a chuckle and an appreciative wag of his head, and added: "And let me tell you, Eddie boy, that was some song."

The pale lips of the Professor broke into the semblance of a smile. "Thank you, Bud. And, I say, give me that envelope for a moment, will you?"

Allen handed it to him, and with a pencil Windle scribbled a few words just under the girl's name.

"When you give her this," he said, "let her see there's some writing on it, but don't let the others get wise."

It was during this absence of the three young men

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from the concert room that Stacy Paget conceived a thought which immediately impressed him as a most masterly and in all probability a valuable one.

“I’ll tell you what,” he said, suddenly turning to Ivy and speaking in a low voice so that the rest of his party could not hear, “I’ve got a great idea. That last scene in our show is no good and never was. Why not make it an interior instead of the outside of the café and give a reproduction of a show like this. I could get this boy to play the piano and sing, and some of our girls could do their stunts and supply the local color. They certainly seem to act as if they knew all about it.”

Paget’s brain was still busy with this new idea, when a few minutes later Ivy Hettler excused herself on the plea that she wished to speak to some of the girls in the back of the hall. In the confusion that reigned throughout the crowded room, it was not difficult for her to slip unnoticed through the side door to the street.

When she saw the tall, lank figure of Eddie Windle, she gave a little cry of happiness and ran toward him with her hands held out before her, but the pleasure of the meeting seemed to be all with the girl.

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“Not yet, Ivy,” he said, keeping his hands stuck deep in his coat pockets. “Not just yet. I’ve got to have a few words with you first. There’s something I want to ask you.”

The girl looked at him with wide open eyes of wonder and disappointment. “Why, Eddie,” she gasped, “I don’t understand you at all. Why didn’t you recognize me in there, and what did you mean by that song, anyhow? My, Eddie,” and her eyes were smiling again with real enthusiasm, “but you did get it over, though. It was great and Paget wants to engage you to go with our show and sing it in a cabaret scene. Wouldn’t that be fine?”

By way of answer, Windle took Ivy by the arm and started to lead her across the street.

“Let’s go to Siebert’s place,” he said. “We can talk better there. It’s a dance hall. Do you know it?”

Ivy shook her head. “Is it respectable?” she asked.

“Respectable enough, and besides, it’s just around the corner.”

Ivy made a feeble effort to hold back, but Windle hurried her across the street.

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“Won’t they need you at the piano back there?” she asked.

“No, not for a while. The boys have some songs they can do without me.”

In a few minutes more they were at Siebert’s, seated at a little table, shut off from the big dancing room by a lattice screen. Near them a woman was making love to a tipsy sailor, but otherwise they were quite alone. Beyond the screen a colored brass band was blaring out a waltz, and a hundred women from the district and as many of their men friends were moving slowly up and down the long smoke-befogged room in an exaggerated form of the Grizzly Bear.

“Well,” Ivy asked, “why did you bring me here? You must have had a good reason, Eddie—a mighty good reason.”

The Professor folded his arms before him on the table and looked the girl evenly in the eyes.

“Yes, Ivy,” he said, speaking very slowly and very gently. “I think I have a good reason. I was talking to some of your girls last night at the Oriental, and they were telling me about you being promoted, and that you rehearsed pretty badly in the part, and that you got your rise through Paget, and that

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you didn't deserve it anyhow. It wasn't very nice talk, but, you see, they didn't know I knew you or that we'd grown up in the same town. You see, I say, they didn't know all about that, and so they talked pretty free.”

Ivy gave a little toss to her chin, and, with angry, unseeing eyes, she stared at the bare wall across the room.

“So *I'm* any one's little girlie now but yours. Is that it?”

The Professor nodded. “Yes,” he said, “I guess that's about it. Leastwise, it was what those girls said or as much as said. That's why I wanted to see you to-night. Ivy, you never lied to me in the old days—never.”

Ivy turned back her blue eyes toward him, and he saw that all the fire and the resentment had gone out of them, and in their place there had come a look of infinite weariness.

“That's right, Eddie,” she said, and she spoke quite calmly again, “that's right. I never lied to you and I never could. Not to *you*. It wouldn't somehow be right after all you did for me at home and always so good to me and wanting me to marry

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you and all that. No, Eddie, I'm telling you the truth—the girls were wrong.”

Windle suddenly tossed up his head and gave a sharp gasp of wonderful content. His face fairly shone with happiness now, and quickly putting out his hand, he took one of the girl's in it and held it tightly. But for some reason that he could not for the moment understand, Ivy seemed to resent this and slowly wrenched her hand free. She looked out through the lattice screen at the crowd of dancers revolving slowly about the big hall, and then she looked back at Windle's questioning eyes and drew her thin pretty lips into a straight hard line.

When she spoke, her voice was quite colorless and apparently without feeling of any kind.

“I said,” she began, “that the girls *were* wrong. I'll try to explain——”

The look of happiness had suddenly faded from the Professor's face.

“That's it,” he interrupted her, “that's it. I wish you would explain. I'm afraid I don't quite understand.”

Ivy's lips broke into a little wavering smile, but there was no smile in her eyes.

“It's not very difficult to understand. It ought

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to be pretty easy for a man like you who has been mixed up in theatrical business, who works in a back-room show. I've had a lot of men in love with me and some of them had money, too, but Stacy Paget is the one man I know who is in love with me and who happens to be in the position to give me the chance I want.”

“Why, Ivy,” Windle gasped, “you don't know what you're saying. You're crazy.”

The girl shook her head, and again her lips broke into the same mirthless smile.

“No, I'm not crazy. It's this way, Eddie. I've tried to get along and be decent, as—as you would have me. I've worked and I've worked and I've struggled to get out of the chorus, but I just couldn't do it. I saw girls getting ahead of me that didn't have half of my talent or half of my ambition, but they did have a man friend who cared enough and was in the position to give them a chance. What's the use!—you know this business. Stacy Paget is the first man of this kind that ever came my way and very probably he'll be the last, and I can't throw away the only chance I may ever get. I can't do it.”

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Ivy clasped her hands before her on the table and stared hard into Windle's frightened eyes.

“Can't you understand, Eddie,” she begged. “Don't make it any harder for me than it is. Don't you suppose I've suffered, too? It's been no fun for me, believe me. Do you think I like to have these other women in the company point at me and talk about me as they talked about me to you last night? But I tell you, he gave me my chance. He's going to do a world of things for me in the future, and he's the only one that could or would.”

The girl's manner suddenly changed to one of great animation and eagerness, and she leaned far across the table. “And he'll do wonders for you, too, Eddie. I told you how he wanted you to go with the show and do your specialty.”

Windle nodded gravely, and taking out a package of cigarettes from his coat pocket lighted one and blew clouds of smoke up at the ceiling, just as he did when he was at the piano at the Oriental. For a few moments there was silence and then the boy, for he was really only a boy, pushed his chair from the table and stood looking down at Ivy.

“You poor, lonely kid,” he said, “I've got to look out for you somehow, if only for the sake of old

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times, but I don't know how to do it. That's the trouble, Ivy dear, I don't know just how to do it.”

The girl smiled and sprang to her feet.

“That's all right, Eddie,” she laughed, “you'll have a talk with Paget, won't you? Promise me you will?”

“Yes,” Windle said, “I'll have a talk with Paget. I'll promise you that.”

It was some time later that night at the Oriental, or rather during the early morning hours, when the manager had his first opportunity to speak to Windle alone. The Professor had finished singing and was sitting by himself at a table at the far end of the room when Paget joined him and, without any waste of time in preliminaries, at once told him of his scheme to introduce the back-room scene in his musical comedy.

“I'd like to talk business with you,” Windle said, “but I can't do it here. I'm tied up with these people, and if they thought I was going to jump them for a better job they'd make trouble. They're pretty tough folks to deal with. The boss is looking at us now.”

Paget nodded. “All right,” he said, “I'll meet you anywhere you say, but make it soon.”

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For a few moments the Professor remained silent, apparently thinking it over.

“The show ought to be finished in half an hour,” he said at last. “If you could send your party home, I might meet you near here at my room. It’s on a nice quiet street, two blocks south—just across the railroad tracks. The street has four rows of trees on it, and it’s very broad. You can’t miss it. When you reach the corner turn to your left. I’ll meet you at my door.”

“Aren’t you making a good deal of mystery out of a little business talk?” Paget asked.

Windle leaned across the table.

“You don’t understand the kind of people I’m working for,” he whispered. “You can take it or leave it. I’m not so keen about the job anyhow.”

Paget shrugged his shoulders.

“All right,” he said, “I’ll be there. I suppose it’s safe down here for a man to walk the streets alone this time of night.”

Windle smiled. “Safe,” he repeated. “Why, the district is as safe at night as Broadway and Forty-second Street is at noon. Have you told the folks at your table about this?”

Paget shook his head. “Only one of them.”

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“All right,” Windle said. “Don’t tell the others till I do my getaway. Actors are a gabby lot.”

The crowd at the Oriental gradually dwindled away, and when the Professor closed the top of the piano with a conspicuous bang, all that remained of the audience straggled out of the hot, smoky room into the clear night air and the moonlit streets. Paget put his friends into a taxicab and then started to walk slowly to his meeting-place with Windle.

The Professor left the Oriental by the barrroom entrance, and, once clear of the place, started with long swinging strides toward his destination. By a circuitous route he reached the corner of the street with the four rows of trees some time before Paget, but in the distance he could see the bulky form of the manager coming slowly toward him. Then he hurried along the broad avenue until he had found an open vestibule that offered him ample protection for his purpose.

Save for the footfalls of the approaching Paget it was quite silent now, for the denizens of the district had gone to their beds after the long night of debauch. It was almost as light as day—every crack in the broad, stone pavements and every twig of the spreading trees stood out in bold, black relief against

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the pure white moonlight. Paget glanced up at the gray and pink plaster dwellings, with their closed shutters and rusted iron balconies and overhanging roofs. To the manager every house looked gloomy and foreboding; the whole scene seemed somehow fraught with mystery and to portend disaster, and he keenly regretted that he had ever come. But now he was almost at his destination, and at the sight of the broad street, with its four rows of spreading trees, he hurried on to find Windle. Hidden in the doorway, the Professor crouched and waited, listening to the oncoming footsteps, which now rang out through the clear night air with an almost metallic distinctness. The dark vestibule had suddenly become very close and the Professor's brow dripped with great beads of perspiration. With one hand he took off his felt hat and threw it sharply from him, while the fingers of the other gripped more tightly a long, bone-handled pocket-knife. The steps were almost opposite the doorway now and, in the brilliant moonlight, the Professor could see the eyes of Paget peering nervously into the shadows of the vestibule. And then a long, lean body hurled itself from the darkened doorway into the searching white light of the street and the blade of a knife whipped

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through the still air. Three times it flashed and fell.

On the following Monday night “The Maid of Mirth” played at Montgomery, but Ivy Hettler was no longer the soubrette of the company. The manager who had succeeded Stacy Paget did not like her in the part and hence recalled the girl who had originally played it, and put Ivy back in the chorus. The same Monday night found the Professor on one of those antiquated and lawless side-wheel show boats which still work up and down the river, stopping every evening at a different town and giving a vaudeville performance simply as a subterfuge to sell rum to the colored people and the poor white trash. On four occasions during the evening the Professor sang his sentimental ballads. But for the remainder of the time he lay on his back in the shadow of the deck-house staring up at the purple sky and blowing rings of cigarette smoke at a crystal star.

THE TWENTY-FIRST REASON

AS if to delay the pleasure of his home-coming Tolliver hesitated at the gate and glanced back down the broad street with its rows of leafy elms and grass-lined walks. He was smiling as he came up the pathway, and when he had reached the bend and saw that his wife was waiting for him on the porch, he stopped before a rose-bush and having cut a full-blown rose carried it to her. She pinned the flower in the folds of her cool white dress and putting her hands on his shoulders kissed him on his damp forehead.

"Oh, Bruce, dear," she laughed, "you're so hot, and you're very late, too. I wish you wouldn't walk so fast from town."

"I know I'm late, dear, very late, but we've been having a long, serious, happy business talk at the office and I wanted to tell you all about it at once."

In his boyish excitement he clasped his fingers tightly about his wife's wrist and led her toward the front door.

THE TWENTY-FIRST REASON

"We can't go into the library," she said, "the children are there."

"The children?" he repeated.

"Yes, Alice and Tommy Leonard."

"Of course," he said, "I didn't understand. We'll go up to your room. Oh, Helen, it's such wonderful news."

He sank into a low chair filled with chintz-covered cushions, and Mrs. Tolliver dropped down before him and, leaning her elbows on his knees, rested her chin between her palms. They had been married now almost twenty years and her figure was just as lithe, her face as fair, and her smile just as winsome and joyous as on the day of their wedding. For twenty years they had been sweethearts.

"Now, Bruce," she said, "I'm quite ready. Tell me the wonderful news."

Tolliver drew a long breath and began: "The boys,"—Tolliver always referred to the members of the firm that employed him as "the boys"—"it seems, got together and decided to give us a present to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the day I first went with them—a present that would really be a present. Guess!"

THE TWENTY-FIRST REASON

"Bruce," Mrs. Tolliver exclaimed, "tell me at once. I can't wait to guess. What is it?"

"A year in Europe."

Mrs. Tolliver drew back and gazed at her husband with wide-open eyes. "A year in Europe," she gasped.

"Exactly—that's it. One year in Europe with full pay." And then the tension broke and Helen Tolliver buried her head in the folds of Bruce's coat. It was some minutes later when she looked up and smiled through dimmed eyes into those of her husband.

"Don't think I'm crying," she stammered, "just because we are to have a year abroad. It's because they understand and appreciate all that you have done for them."

Tolliver nodded. "I know, Helen, dear. For twenty-five long years we've worked pretty hard—you and I."

"I!" Helen protested.

"Yes, you. Many's the time I think I would have quit the grind if you hadn't kept me going. And I tell you, I'm pretty tired—pretty nearly all in. But now in a few months we'll be free—free for a whole year. Think of it, Helen! Italy and the



She pinned the flower in the folds of her cool white dress.

THE TWENTY-FIRST REASON

French cathedrals and Paris—think of it—Paris, *Paris!* How Alice will love it! I wish that boy downstairs would go home and we could tell her now.”

“Alice,” Mrs. Tolliver repeated—“Alice.”

“Of course, Alice. We couldn’t go without Alice, could we? She’s going to be more than half the fun.”

With a quick movement Helen pulled herself to her feet and stood before her husband, nervously drawing her handkerchief with one hand through the fingers of the other.

“You see, Bruce,” she whispered, “you see Alice can’t go. Alice—I wanted to tell you on the porch, but you were so full of this trip abroad—you see, Alice is engaged.”

Tolliver stared at his wife with wide-eyed surprise. “Engaged,” he repeated.

“Yes—to Tommy Leonard. It’s all arranged, and I promised them that I would break the news to you. You’re not angry, are you, Bruce? They’re so happy and Tommy is such a nice boy.”

Tolliver pulled himself out of the chair and walked over to the bay window. For some moments he stood looking out on the close-cropped lawn, the neatly trimmed hedge, and the flowering rose-bushes. Then

THE TWENTY-FIRST REASON

he turned to his wife and smiled at her, but she saw that in those few moments his face had suddenly become drawn and that there was no smile in his eyes.

"Why, that's all right, I suppose," he said. "It's just a little sudden, and—and unexpected. Alice always seems such a child to me, but I imagine that's the way with all fathers."

"And all mothers, too," Mrs. Tolliver added. "But you must remember Alice is almost nineteen now."

Tolliver nodded, and after a moment's silence went on speaking again. "There was another proposition the firm made me. They said in case I didn't care to go abroad that I could keep right on and that they would give me five thousand dollars in place of the trip. They didn't care, you understand, what I did, so long as they rewarded me for the twenty-five years of work."

"But, Bruce, dear," Helen protested eagerly, "you don't mean that you are thinking of giving up the trip abroad because Alice is going to be married. Just as soon as the wedding is over you and I will start out on our second honeymoon and this one will last a whole long year."

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Tolliver moved away from the window and sat down again in the deep-cushioned chair. "Come over here, Helen," he said, "and let's talk it over."

She sat at his feet and, with her elbow resting on his knee, nestled the mass of soft blond curls in the bend of her arm. "Now, Bruce," she said, "please go on."

"Well," Tolliver began, "I confess it's a bit of a shock to me. If it had been Peter Wood or Harry Howland I wouldn't have been surprised."

"Harry Howland!" Mrs. Tolliver protested. "Harry Howland wouldn't propose to the loveliest girl that ever breathed. He's too selfish."

"I wonder. It was just the other afternoon out on the golf club porch that he was talking to a lot of us old fellows on this very subject of the high cost of marriage, and it seemed to me that there was a good deal of common-sense in what he said. He claimed that the bachelor of moderate means was not selfish, because, in not marrying, he deliberately gave up the chance of the only perfectly happy, well-rounded life a man could enjoy in this world."

"Then why does he choose to remain a bachelor?" Helen snapped. "There's plenty of girls would marry Harry if he'd only ask them."

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"Because he claimed that it was not fair to the parents—he argued that just at the time when the fathers and mothers had reached the age when the steam begins to give out and had saved enough to make the future a little easier, their children, who were wholly ignorant of the cost of living, started in to raise another set of mouths and stomachs for the old folks to feed. Harry claimed that the Country Club was entirely composed of old men who could only afford to play with old chipped and cracked golf balls because they needed the money for sterilized milk and trained nurses for their grandchildren."

Mrs. Tolliver turned and looked her husband evenly in the eyes. "I have my opinion of any woman who really loved a man and wouldn't marry him if he couldn't guarantee her anything but bread and cheese and kisses."

"That's the way it used to be," Tolliver laughed, "but now they've reversed that old saying; it's kisses and bread and cheese. They get married and make sure that the Church and the State legalize the kisses and then take a chance on the bread and cheese."

"And if they do," demanded Helen, "and are

THE TWENTY-FIRST REASON

satisfied with the kisses and bread and cheese, as you put it . . . ?”

“But that’s just the trouble—they’re not satisfied, because Jones, who knew them before the marriage and who is rich, asks them out to dinner once so often and gives them caviare and vintage wines. And even if Jones doesn’t ask them out and make them miserable, how about the new babies? The huskiest baby in the world can’t digest bread and cheese, and it’s a well-known fact that all babies hate to be kissed.”

Mrs. Tolliver pulled herself to her feet and, with her pink-and-white face greatly flushed, faced her husband.

“Then;” she demanded, “you refuse your consent to Alice’s marriage to Tommy?”

“Not at all,” Tolliver said. “Ask them to come up. Let’s talk it over.”

Tommy Leonard, an ex-college athlete of the Greek-god type, six feet and no waist line, and Alice Tolliver, a pale, exquisitely frail replica of her blond pretty mother, stood hand in hand in the doorway.

“Come in,” called Tolliver cheerily.

Greatly relieved at this unexpected and wholly

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genial greeting, the two young people fairly flew across the room to receive the parental blessing.

"Not yet, not quite yet," Tolliver laughed and waved them back. "You two sit down on that lounge and we'll all thresh this thing out together."

The happy smiles suddenly faded from the faces of Tommy and Alice, and side by side, they reluctantly took their places on the sofa and cast gloomy glances in the direction of Mr. and Mrs. Tolliver.

"In the first place," Tolliver began, "on what do you two expect to live?"

Once more the faces of the young people broke into the most cheerful smiles, and Alice fairly laughed aloud. "Is that all?" she gurgled. "Oh, daddy, I was afraid it was something really serious and unpleasant."

Tolliver drew his lips into a straight line and glanced in the direction of the prospective bridegroom.

"We've gone over the matter pretty carefully, sir," Leonard began, "and we believe that we can live, and live pretty well, on my present income; and, of course, my salary will be increased from time to time."

"I'm glad that you are not counting too strongly,"



“In the first place,” Tolliver began, “on what do you two expect to live?”

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Tolliver said, "on these occasional increases in your wages. The directors of banks in small towns are not usually given to raising the salary of their paying tellers with any great frequency and, believe me, Tommy, there is a limit and the limit is not a very high one. Without capital I fear you will find it difficult to make money on the side and, to be quite frank, I don't know where the capital is coming from. If I were a millionaire I'd willingly hand over half of it to Alice to-morrow—that is, if I thought it would make her happy, but I'm not a millionaire. I could do very little to help you."

With her blue eyes ablaze, Alice sat forward on the sofa and looked her father fairly in his now serious face.

"There is one thing, father," she began most impressively, "that I want you to understand at the start. Tommy and I do not expect or want any kind of help from you. We have already agreed that rather than go to you, Tommy would be a policeman and I would scrub floors. Not that I don't appreciate how kind and good you are, but we, both of us, understand your circumstances, just as we understand our own. We have gone into every detail and have thought of every expense."

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A blush of motherly pride spread over the delicate features of Mrs. Tolliver, and she glanced admiringly at her daughter.

"You must remember, Bruce," she said, "that Alice is not without practical experience. You know how well she kept house for us when I was ill last winter."

"Really, Mr. Tolliver," Leonard insisted, "I'm sure we could do it. We wouldn't think of marriage unless we had considered every contingency."

Tolliver stuck his hands deep into his trouser pockets, pursed his lips, and glanced in turn at his wife and daughter and then at Leonard. "I'll tell you three a story," he said. "It's a story of the race-track, but I think it rather applies to this case. One day a race was just about to start and the owner of the favorite was standing on the lawn watching the horses which were already at the post. A very excited young man who had bet on the favorite ran up to the owner and said: 'I've bet on your horse. He's bound to win, don't you think so?' The owner kept his field glasses on the horses and replied to the young man, 'No, I shouldn't think so.' 'Why not?' gasped the young man, who was very much surprised. 'There are just twenty reasons,' the owner said, 'why

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my horse should not win. He may be left at the post, or he may stumble, or he may put his foot in a hole and break his leg, or the jockey may break his stirrup, or his weights may fall out, or—' Just then the horses started, and the favorite, who was on the outside, cut across the track, got jammed against the rail by the other horses, and the jockey was thrown over the fence and ignominiously landed in the infield. The owner put away his glasses and turning to the young man said: 'I never saw that happen before. It seems that there are twenty-one reasons.' ” For some moments there was silence and then Tolliver continued: “From my experience I have found that it is the twenty-first reason that makes the best-laid schemes gang aft a-gley, and causes most of the trouble in this world. The jockeys who ride our favorite hobbies are always being thrown over the fence or doing some foolish thing that we hadn't expected and hadn't prepared for.”

Whereat Alice Tolliver suddenly broke into peals of laughter and clapped her hands from sheer youthful pleasure. “But, daddy, we have prepared for the twenty-first reason. We thought of it after we had everything arranged for, and we call it the contingency fund. We took it from our Christmas and

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anniversary gift expenses and Tommy will not take out as much life-insurance as he had intended. So you see we *have* prepared for the unexpected, don't you, daddy?"

Tolliver smiled wearily and slowly nodded his assent. "Yes, I see," he said, "and I only hope that your matrimonial books will balance at the end of the first year. If your mother says 'yes' you have my permission. I have never denied her anything yet, have I, my dear?"

Helen Tolliver, whose emotions had been considerably stirred, came to her husband's side and, burying her head on his shoulder, tearfully admitted that he never had. Thus it was that Alice Tolliver and Tommy Leonard were officially betrothed.

It was agreed that the wedding should take place on the first day of October, and that just one week later Mr. and Mrs. Tolliver should start forth on their second honeymoon and for their first sight of the purple skies and the gray-green hills of Italy and the Riviera. Those were busy days for the Tolliver family—the combination of the marriage of an only child and the first trip abroad was indeed a serious one, especially as the trip was for a whole year and

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the marriage, if one could judge by the devotion of the young couple to each other, at least a journey for life. The little suburban town was fairly agog with excitement, for marriages among its prominent citizens were none too frequent and few were better known or better liked than the Tollivers. The great day dawned at last, and the air was filled with the orange sunlight and the cool, crisp breezes of the early Autumn. It was in all ways a day long to be remembered and talked over for years to come by the gossips of the town. From the early gathering of the guests at the pretty little ivy-covered church until their departure down the rice-covered steps of the bride's home, late the same afternoon, surely nature and the Tollivers had done their best and their best had proved most bountiful indeed.

"And now," said Tolliver to Mrs. Tolliver, as the last frock-coated guest waved his silk hat from the gate in hilarious farewell, "*now*, my dear, we have only ourselves to think of. I will get Bridget to go up to the garret and help me down with the trunks."

"Fine," said Mrs. Tolliver, "we're off."

"Nearly," said Mr. Tolliver, and went to look for Bridget.

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To their friends, of course, the itinerary of the young married couple remained a profound secret, but the Tollivers knew that the honeymooners were by easy stages wending their happy way to the big brick hotel down at the Hot Springs in the Virginia hills where so many young people have begun their lives together. Helen Tolliver was frequently interrupted in her packing by the arrival of telegrams and letters filled with expressions of her daughter's complete happiness and contented conclusions as to married life in general, as well as the frequent reiteration of the news that Tommy was the truest and most devoted husband, and had proved his sterling worth in a thousand different ways. "The hotel bills may be a little high," Alice wrote in one of her letters, "but the contingent fund is yet intact. Tell father that the 'twenty-first reason' is a bugaboo to frighten timid children."

And then for two days there were neither telegrams nor letters. The missive so anxiously waited for arrived when the Tollivers were at dinner the night before the great day on which they were to start on their second honeymoon. Tolliver sat back in his chair while Helen read the letter carefully

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through with a face that seemed to grow not only more sombre but even tragic with each line.

"Is it as bad as that?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, "it is as bad as that." Then she dismissed the maid and in an even, expressionless voice read the letter aloud from its tender opening to its last unhappy line.

"MY DEAR, ALWAYS LOVING MOTHER:

"I have not written you for two days because I could not say that all had been going well with us and I wanted to tell you positively when I did write whether your Alice was a wife or a widow. On Wednesday afternoon a rich young friend of Tommy's, a New York man named Wallace Jones, loaned us his car for the afternoon and we decided to go to Flag Rock, which is about six or seven miles from our hotel. It was a beautiful limousine car and the road was fine, but on our way home I suppose we were going a little too fast down hill and we struck a ridge across the road which down here they call a 'thank-you-ma'am.' Tommy had his arm about me at the time and we both were bumped up so that our heads struck the top of the limousine. I had on my yellow straw hat with the blue flowers which

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Tommy says looks like an inverted peach basket. Anyhow, it saved me, but Tommy was bare-headed as usual, and his head struck a rib of the limousine and he got what the doctors call a depressed fracture. There are very good doctors here who know just what waters you ought to take for rheumatism, but they said this required one of the most delicate operations in surgery, and we telephoned to Richmond for a surgeon. As soon as he arrived he did what they call trephining and now they say Tommy is all right. Unfortunately, I'm afraid we will have to stay here for some time, as the doctors say this is fine air for his recovery, and that will be a question of several months. It was most unfortunate that he hit his head on the left side, for that paralyzed his right hand and it seems that Tommy counts out the money at the bank with his right hand. It is all terrible and I don't know what we are to do about the expense. The Richmond surgeon said it wouldn't be fair to his profession to charge less than a thousand dollars for the operation, and then there are the other doctors and the nurses and the hotel rooms are very dear for anything except a honeymoon and the colored bell-boys make faces at you every time you don't give them a quarter for bringing you a lump of ice

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or a fresh towel, and Tommy needs so many towels for his poor head. Do tell us, mamma, please, what I am to do. We were so very happy before that Mr. Jones loaned us his car, which would have been all right if it had been an open car, but he couldn't be held responsible because it was really not the fault of the car, but that awful 'thank-you-ma'am.' Write me, please, soon, mamma, what am I going to do about it all.

"Your loving but miserable daughter,

"ALICE."

"Well, what are we to do?" said Mrs. Tolliver, and now that the strain of reading the letter was over her voice broke perceptibly and tears came into her pretty blue eyes.

"Well," said Tolliver, smiling across the table. "The main thing is that Tommy is all right and now it is up to us to come to their assistance. Alice evidently is not scrubbing floors as she says nothing about it, and in Tommy's present condition I doubt if he could get a job as a policeman even if he wanted it. I will see 'the boys' to-morrow morning and ask them if that offer of theirs of the check for five thousand is open, and I've no doubt that it is."

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"And our trip abroad," sobbed Mrs. Tolliver.

Bruce walked around the table and put his hands gently on his wife's trembling shoulders. "That's off, I'm afraid, my dear," he said, "all off for the present. Perhaps twenty-five years from now we may have another chance. But just now I'll go telegraph Alice not to worry and that you will be coming down there to see her by the first train you can catch to-morrow."

"You're so good, Bruce," Mrs. Tolliver said very tearfully. "Of course we couldn't go now. It's just as you said, it's the twenty-first reason that makes all of the trouble, but how could any one foresee such a thing as this? Who could expect a thousand dollar operation and all of those other fearful expenses the very first week of their honeymoon!"

"Trephining, I believe, is uncommon," said Tolliver, "but if most of the mothers and fathers all over the world aren't giving up trips abroad to pay for trephining, most of them are giving up something to pay their daughters' butcher bills or house-rent or for something equally necessary, and at least to the daughters and sons-in-law quite as unexpected."

"I suppose they are," sobbed Mrs. Tolliver, "but

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really, Bruce, they've been doing it for so long that they seem to like it."

"That's true, too," said Tolliver, "but again they might like the trip abroad if they were ever let get farther out to sea than the docks at Hoboken."

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THE New York car was at last left alone and at peace on a deserted siding far up the junction yard. Philip Hyde closed the book he had been reading, looked out of the window on a very high and most uninteresting bank of cinders, and started in search of his friend, James Werden. He found him sitting on the steps of the end platform gazing up at a perfect midsummer silver moon which shone resplendent from a cloudless, purple sky.

"Get off those steps," Hyde said, "and give me a chance to look about. Where are we anyhow?"

The two young men swung themselves to the ground and slowly climbed up the steep, crumbling bank.

"This," explained Werden, "is the ancient village of Clifton Junction—Clifton Junction, Virginia—and the porter tells me that the northbound train will pick us up in something over an hour. That is, it will if it's on time, and if the southbound train, which should get here just before it, is on time,

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both of which events he seemed to regard as extremely remote possibilities."

They were standing on a broad, dusty roadway, which for several hundred yards ran parallel to the railway, and at the end of this they could see the lights of the station.

Across the roadway from the tracks there was a dismal-looking row of little fruit stores and cheap restaurants, lighted by an occasional smoky oil lamp or a flaming kerosene torch, and one building, which was no less forlorn but a little larger than its destitute neighbors, had a transparency hung out showing the words: "Larrabee's Place."

Back of where they stood the road ran as far as an old covered wooden bridge, which crossed the railroad tracks, and where civilization, if Clifton Junction could be called civilization, seemed to cease entirely. Beyond this they could see nothing but the black jagged lines of endless wooded hills cut out against the purple sky.

"That bridge," said Werden, "leads to the town inn, which is closed. The residential quarter—at least so the porter assures me—lies down there back of the station, and the white-light district is confined to the barn-like structure illuminated with the oil

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lamps on our immediate right. Some nights they have moving pictures and vaudeville."

"Judging by the welcoming lights over the box-office window," Hyde said, "it seems to be one of those nights. I suppose, as confirmed patrons of the drama, we really ought to go, but first I'm for a stroll down the main street."

Slowly they sauntered along the dusty road in the direction of the station.

"Do you suppose," said Werden, "that people really live the whole year round in a place like this?"

Hyde shook his head. "They do if you call breathing and eating and sleeping living. Besides, some nights they have vaudeville and moving pictures."

For a moment they hesitated before the door of the hotel, or, rather, the barroom for, with the exception of a hallway just broad enough for the stairs which led to the upper part of the house, the café occupied the entire ground floor.

"Could I proffer you a drink?" asked Hyde.

"I don't know," said Werden, "we might try a bottle of ginger ale or something soft. It's too warm for a regular drink, and anyhow I'd be afraid of the whiskey in a joint like this."

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They pushed aside the swinging door and stepped into the big bare room. All of the windows were closed and the air was foul and stifling. In the centre there was a pool table, over which two oil lamps flickered and sputtered, and dripped oil on the faded cloth. On the right there was a bar, and on the wall back of it two cheap oil paintings covered with bedraggled mosquito net, a long shelf decorated with a few empty bottles, and a cracked and fly-specked mirror. Dirty glasses littered the top of the sloppy bar, the floor looked as if it had not been swept for months, and strips of faded wall paper hung from the discolored walls.

In all ways the place seemed typical of the town. Instinctively, Werden and Hyde turned quickly toward the door, and as they did so Larrabee, the proprietor, slowly arose from a rocking-chair where he had been concealed by the far end of the bar. At the sound of his voice they once more turned back to the room. As well as they could see by the dim light of the oil lamps, the man looked to be at least seventy. He tried to hold his tall, gaunt figure erect, but his heavy shoulders seemed to sag from their own weight, his walk was little better than a

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shuffle, and the bloodshot eyes and trembling hand proclaimed a hard-spent life.

"Don't run away, gentlemen," he grumbled; "didn't you come to buy?" Both from the manner of his speech and movements it was evident that the old man was more or less befuddled by his own liquor.

"Of course we did," Werden said, "but we didn't see you at first—thought the place was deserted."

"You weren't so far wrong at that," Larrabee chuckled. "It is pretty well-nigh deserted." He ran his clawlike fingers through his long, unkempt beard, shifted his eyes about the dirty, neglected room, shrugged his shoulders, and with a ragged towel proceeded to wipe off the far end of the bar.

"Waiting for the New York train?" he asked.

"Yes," said Werden, "but I hear it's not due for an hour. Could you suggest any way in which we could put in our time? It's too hot to sleep in the car."

"There's moving pictures to-night," Larrabee said—"moving pictures and vaudeville."

Werden raised his eyebrows in polite interest.

"And vaudeville!" he repeated.

"Sure, a young couple—Max Mohr and Estelle La Rue—been here all week. Stopped at my hotel,

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but they're taking the Eastern train to-night. What'll it be, gentlemen?"

"Two bottles of ginger ale," Hyde said. "Are they good performers, this Mohr and his partner?"

Heedless of the order, Larrabee continued to lean heavily on the bar and his eyes blinked at Hyde's ignorance. "Didn't you ever hear of Max Mohr in New York?"

"I don't know very many vaudeville people," Hyde apologized. "What's their act like?"

"Songs and dances, and Max tells some comical stories—dress like Italians. She's a beauty, she is—red-haired and wild as a colt. Beauty and the Beast they call themselves in the advertisements. He's an ugly little runt all right, but both of them can sing. She's the handsomest woman ever stopped at my hotel—the handsomest, I guess, I ever saw, and I'll bet she was a lady once, too. You ought to hear them. But I'll tell you he isn't near so good on the stage as when he plays upstairs here in the parlor for Dolly and me. He's got a voice like an angel. You'll see my girl Dolly, too, if you go to the hall. She sells the tickets. What was it you allowed you'd drink?"

"Ginger ale," said Hyde.

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The old man drew his hand across his hard, straight mouth. "What's the matter with regular liquor?" he asked. "'Fraid of it?"

Hyde glanced at the half-empty bottle standing on the bar surrounded by dirty glasses.

"Yes, a little," he said, and smiled genially at the barkeeper.

Larrabee winked one of his bleary eyes and with much difficulty disappeared under the bar. In a few moments he reappeared with a bottle.

"This is my own special brand. You can always depend on a Virginia gentleman for two things—a good bottle of whiskey and a clean shooting iron."

From his hip pocket he pulled out a glistening revolver and laid it solemnly on the bar at the side of the whiskey bottle.

"Now will you drink?" he threatened. His voice was husky and his movements were most unsteady.

Hyde pushed the revolver across the bar.

"Put your gun up," he said. "I'll drink without that. Besides, I don't like professional Southerners."

The old man stuck the revolver back in his pocket and with his drink-inflamed eyes glowered at Hyde.

"No offense," he said. "You're all right, I guess, but that's more than you can say about some of

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you Yanks." He looked up at the ceiling, winked significantly, and mumbled: "I know one that'll stand some watching."

When he had served his customers, Larrabee poured out half a tumbler of whiskey for himself and tossed it off as if it had been water. It was evidently an effort to show how a Southern gentleman drank. The two young men said good night and started for the door.

"Going to the vaudeville?" Larrabee called after them.

"Sure," said Werden.

The old man leaned unsteadily against the bar. "Good," he mumbled, "then you can tell my Dolly that I won't be around to get her to-night. Tell her to come right home as soon as the show's over."

They found her at the box office window, a blond, pretty, frail girl with a wonderful pink and white complexion, and big, round, wistful eyes, innocent as those of a child. She wore a simple white muslin dress with a bow of blue ribbon at her throat. About her neck there was a string of coral beads and in the masses of her golden hair she had placed a wild rose, which gave her quite an air of coquetry. She was a fine example of that truly feminine type

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still to be found about the piazzas of the fashionable summer resorts in the South, and both Werden and Hyde gave a little gasp of astonishment when they first saw her sitting in the stuffy box office. When Werden told her that her father was not to come for her the girl's pale, cupid-bow lips broke into a smile which seemed to say that Werden's news was not news at all but an old, old story.

"Thank you," she said in her low, sweet voice; "thank you, ever so much." And then as the young men seemed inclined to linger before the box office and to continue the conversation, she added: "You'd better hurry right in. The performance will be over in a few minutes. You'll just be in time to hear Mohr and La Rue do their last turn."

The hall was a dingy, low-ceilinged room, lighted by half a dozen smoking oil lamps. At the far end there was a narrow raised stage and before this a piano. Seated on the rough wooden benches there were perhaps twenty-five men and boys. When Werden and Hyde took their seats in the rear of the hall, Mohr and La Rue were already on the stage and, to the accompaniment of the tinkling, ill-tuned piano, were singing the Italian dialect ballad, "My Marietta."

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Max Mohr was of a type once popular in the old-time variety halls, but now relegated to moving-picture houses and summer beer-gardens.

Like most of his kind, he had been born on Hester Street, had learned his dancing steps on street corners, and his comedy methods at the Bowery and the Eighth Avenue burlesque houses. The boy's figure—for, except in his knowledge of crime, he was only a boy—was slight and wiry, even graceful, but his face was that of the smart, knowing Polish Jew, born among the worst class of immigrants, and bred in a district of New York where law and order are only bywords. Unpleasant, almost repulsive, as was his face, there was still left a certain sweetness in his voice and a kind of passionate charm in the daring of his love-making. His confidence in his own ability was abnormal, even for a vaudeville performer of his own low type, and he seemed always to be working rather to amuse his partner than to interest his audience. To the people on the benches near the stage he paid no heed at all, but both Werden and Hyde noticed that while singing the most impassioned lines of his song he glanced to the back of the room. Instinctively they turned and saw that Dolly Larrabee

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was standing in the doorway which led from the box office to the interior of the hall.

Hyde gently nudged Werden. "Clifton Junction," he whispered, "seems to be waking up. Do you remember what that old barkeeper Larrabee said about a Yank that would stand watching?"

By way of reply Werden grinned cheerfully and in the dim light of a neighboring lamp tried to read the little one-sheet programme that Miss Larrabee had handed him with the tickets.

"Personally," he said, "I'm most interested in the lady performer with the Zaza-colored hair. Here it is: 'Max Mohr and Estelle La Rue, New York's favorite artists—Beauty and the Beast—in songs and dances.' She's a beauty all right, and she certainly doesn't belong in this kind of a place. I tell you there's real distinction for you, and did you ever see such poise?"

Hyde shook his head. "I can't make it out at all. I've seen a lot of leading soubrettes in musical comedies on Broadway who weren't in her class. She can sing and she can dance—that is, she apparently could if she wanted to—and my! but isn't she good to look at. There's a reason, but it surely can't be that little Polish kid."

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To the eye of the practised theatregoer, it was evident at a glance that Estelle La Rue had sunk very far below the position to which her ability and beauty entitled her. Even the dress of the Italian street singer she wore, old and frayed as it was, had evidently once cost a great deal of money. Like her partner, she, too, seemed wholly indifferent to the provincial audience, but, unlike him, her performance was altogether listless and evidently but a shadow of what it might have been. When they had finished their song and the curtain fell, the small audience clamored loudly for more, but Mohr and La Rue evidently knew that it was their last turn of their last night in Clifton Junction and positively refused to appear again. There was a short series of comic moving pictures and then the audience got up, stretched itself, and wandered slowly out of the dingy, ill-smelling hall into the warm, moonlight night. The two Northerners stopped on the curb, just across the sidewalk in front of the box office, and watched Miss Larrabee take the tin money box from the drawer, lock it, and then put out the lamp. A moment later the girl came out carrying the box under her arm and, as she passed, nodded and smiled pleasantly at the two young men.

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Hyde approached her in his most deferential manner.

"Couldn't we accompany you as far as the hotel?" he asked. "It seems hardly safe for you to be walking the streets alone with all that money."

The girl stopped and laughingly shook the box to make the few quarters and dimes it contained jingle cheerfully.

"No, thank you," she said; "it's not very heavy, and I've only got to carry it around the corner. Then I must come back and lock up. Good night."

They watched her until she had disappeared, and once more found themselves quite alone. The audience had somehow melted into the shadows, and the little town was as silent and deserted as a graveyard at midnight. Werden opened his watch and closed it with a snap.

"It's a good half-hour to train time, and not an adventure in sight. Don't you think as fellow wanderers from the great city we ought to call on Mr. Max Mohr? Also we might meet the beautiful Estelle La Rue. Even to say 'How are you?' to a lady who looks like that would be an adventure."

"I have no intention of calling on Mr. Max Mohr," Hyde said with some asperity. "We are in a foreign,

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perhaps a hostile country and, anyhow, I don't believe in butting in where we're not wanted. I am perfectly willing to go back to the hall and wait there for the train or until we are put out, but that's as far as I'll go."

"Good," laughed Werden. "We'll sit down and watch for Miss La Rue. I'd really like to see what she looks like off the stage."

And so in silence they returned to the hall, which was now quite deserted. All of the lamps had been turned out except one at the left side of the stage just over the piano, and the light from this was so meagre that the two young men had considerable difficulty in groping their way to a bench in the rear of the hall.

"Is this your idea of an adventure?" Hyde whispered. "Personally I prefer the moonlight and fresh air."

"Wait," said Werden, and as he spoke Mohr and Estelle La Rue came out of the door which led from the stage to the auditorium. The girl continued on toward the front door of the hall, but the man crossed the room and sat down before the piano.

"Aren't you coming?" she called.

As if to show his indifference, Mohr played over

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a few chords and hummed the opening bars of "My Marietta."

"Not yet," he called back to her. "I'll be over to the hotel before the train starts. I think I'll stay here now and help Dolly close up. You can do the packing. There's not much of it. See you later, Stella."

The woman was standing within a few feet of where Hyde and Werden sat, but they were in the shadow of the wall, and she was unconscious of their presence. For a moment she stood quite motionless looking at Mohr; then she took a step toward him, but apparently changed her mind, shrugged her shoulders, and walked slowly from the hall.

She had been gone but a few minutes when Dolly Larrabee returned. In one hand she carried a small valise and, apparently not wishing Mohr to see it, carefully hid it behind the open door. Then she walked down the aisle and joined him at the piano. By the dim light of the single bracket-lamp over Mohr's head Hyde and Werden could dimly see what was taking place. The girl rested her elbows on the piano and, with her chin between her palms, looked steadfastly down at Mohr, who continued to half sing, half hum a coon lullaby, and accompany himself

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softly on the piano. With his right hand still on the keys he held out his left to her, and she took it in both of hers and for a moment pressed it against her cheek.

Back in the darkness of the rear of the hall Werden nudged Hyde. "It looks bad to me," he whispered.

The boy at the piano resumed his singing and playing. His voice grew a little louder, and he ran on from one song to another without interruption, often singing but one verse, and frequently repeating that several times. Sometimes he sang in English and sometimes in Italian dialect, and again in pure Italian, but they were all songs of love, and Werden and Hyde began to understand why old Larrabee had said Max sang like an angel. Even the two young men back in the shadows of the bare, dingy hall were fascinated by the innate art of the Polish boy. At his birth God had put into him the love of women, and had given him a voice with which he could tell his love and make women love him. It was an accomplishment which Max Mohr had practised since his childhood, and better than any one else he knew his own power. If there had been any doubt in the mind of Dolly Larrabee, the Pole had evidently

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dispelled it. Werden and Hyde watched him fascinate her and draw her to him as a snake does its helpless prey. They watched him rise slowly from the piano. With a low sob the girl came to him, and he put his arms about her and kissed her full on the lips. Then he placed his hands on her shoulders and, holding her at arm's length, looked evenly into her eyes. He spoke to her in a voice that was half prayer, half command, and the words rang out clearly and echoed through the bare, cheerless hall. "You will go away with me to-night?"

Unflinching, the girl looked back into his eyes.

"Yes," she said, "I will go with you to-night."

It was just at this moment that Werden and Hyde heard the rustle of a woman's dress and, looking about, saw the tall figure of Estelle La Rue standing in the open doorway. For a moment she remained quite motionless, her clenched hands pressed against her breast; and then, unseen by Mohr or the girl, she swung about and vanished into the night.

Mohr had disappeared through the door leading to the stage, but in a few moments he returned carrying a dress-suit case. With his free hand he clasped Dolly by the arm, and they started hurriedly up the aisle.

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"This, I think," said Werden, "is where we get busy."

To the intense surprise of the runaways, Hyde and Werden appeared suddenly from the blackness of the rear of the hall and, walking out into the aisle, effectively blocked the way to the door.

Mohr dropped Dolly's arm and walked up to within a few feet of where they stood.

"Well," he asked, smiling, "who are you?"

"It doesn't really make much difference who we are," Werden said, "except that we happen to be friends of Miss Larrabee's father, and we are going to see that you don't harm his daughter."

Max Mohr threw back his head and laughed aloud. "That's funny," he cried; "that's what I call funny. Get out of my way, you boobs."

It was probably the imperturbability of the two young men before him that suddenly made the actor lose his bravado and break into a storm of rage. He no longer laughed, and his face was livid with uncontrolled passion.

"Get out of my way, I tell you," he shouted, and shook his clenched fist in Werden's face. "Get out of my way, or I'll—I'll kill you."

Werden looked down calmly at the little, trem-

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bling figure before him, and smiled pleasantly into the boy's flashing eyes. "You're getting excited, Mohr," he said. "Let's take it easy and talk it over. We're not a couple of boobs or rubes either, that you're up against. We come from the big city, too, although probably from a different district. I know you and your kind, lots of them, and I knew you'd get the best of a girl like this and then throw her away with as little feeling as you would an old shoe. You may be pretty good in this line of work, but you're not going to get away with it this time, believe me."

There was another sudden change in Mohr's volatile manner, and his sharp, ferret-like eyes looked curiously into those of the two men before him.

He drove his clenched fist into the open palm of his other hand, and, turning sharply on his heel, walked slowly down the aisle.

The girl's slight figure sank on a neighboring bench and, resting her arms on the back of it, she buried her head in them, and they could see her frail shoulders shaking with sobs. In a few moments Mohr came back and, going over to where Dolly sat, he touched her very gently on the shoulder.

"It's all right, little girl," he said. "You see, it'll

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all come right." Then he returned once more to face Werden and Hyde. He was quite calm now, his voice low, even pleasant, and the former insolence of his manner had changed to that of the petitioner.

"I'm in wrong," he began, "I can see that. You've got me all right. But it's just possible you don't understand. As you say, you two ain't no rubes. You're wise all right, and I guess you're hep to me and my kind. But just this once you're wrong. I've turned some dirty tricks in my time, but, say, I never knew a girl like this before. You understand—well, the others were different. Stella, now, when I first met her, she was way up in vaudeville, and I pulled her down to the moving picture game, but, Lord, Stella wasn't no Dolly. I know I was a wharf rat, and for years I run with the Eastman gang, and I done my bit—a year and eight months at Sing Sing. Yes, I did, but Dolly knows that, 'cause I told her myself. But, gentlemen, can't a man come back? Just because he done time, ain't he goin' to ever get the chance to make good? I'm a lot better than this ten-a-day. I can get into big time if I once get the start, and Dolly, she'd go up with me. My God, aren't you goin' to give me half a chance?"

"What's the idea?" Werden asked.

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Suddenly a wonderful change came into the boy's face. His eyes fairly glistened, his whole manner became alert, and when he spoke again it was with great rapidity and eagerness.

"It's like this," he ran on. "The southbound train gets here just before the Eastern express. Dolly and I are to cross the tracks and get on the first car of the southbound just as she is pulling out. They believe I'm going North, and'll never get wise to our taking the other train. We'll be in Cincinnati to-morrow, and then we'll get married. I got friends there, and we'll lay off for a week, and then I'm back to work, and good work on the big time. Do you'se get me?"

From a great distance there came to those in the little hall the long, low whistle of the approaching train.

Mohr sprang toward Werden, and tugged nervously at his coat-sleeve.

"That's her," he whispered, "that's the southbound. You're goin' to let us go, ain't you?"

He rushed over to where Dolly sat, and, shaking her roughly by the shoulder, clasped her by the wrist and dragged her back to the aisle, where Hyde and Werden still blocked the way.

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"Let us by, won't you?" the boy whimpered, "we ain't got no time to waste. It's now or never with us."

But the two men in the aisle did not move.

"Why not ask her old man?" Werden said.

"Ask old Larrabee?" Mohr shouted. "You're crazy. He'd rather see her dead."

As he saw his chance slipping from him, the boy once more lost his servile, cringing ways, and, with his arms raised above his head, he shook his fists in a storm of impotent rage. His voice, now gone far beyond his control, had become but a series of shrill cries and wild, inarticulate oaths. In terror the girl stood trembling behind him, her hands resting on his shoulders.

"Let us by," he shouted, "damn you two—" And then of a sudden his cries died away, his arms dropped to his side, and his eyes shifted from the men to the open doorway of the hall. For a moment there was silence among them, because all four knew what had happened. Through the still night air they heard the patter of many hurrying footsteps and the distant cries of the approaching mob.

"Somebody's told," Mohr cried. "They're after us. Now will you get out of the way?"

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Werden stepped aside.

"You're too late, Mohr," he said. "I wouldn't try it if I were you. You'd better stay here and take a chance."

But the Pole grabbed Dolly by the hand, and together they dashed through the open door.

As the crowd caught sight of the couple it gave a great cry of triumph and started after them with redoubled speed. Their hands still clasped, Mohr and the girl cast one glance back at the oncoming crowd, and then started up the steep road toward the old bridge, which was the only way of escape left open to them.

As Werden and Hyde came out of the hall, they saw the angry, yelling crowd sweep by them. At the end of the straggling mob they recognized old Larrabee stumbling along the rough road, trying to keep up with the others, and cursing Mohr at every step. At his side was Estelle La Rue, helping the old man on his way as best she could. The only woman in the crowd, she seemed to stand out quite apart from the others. The brilliant moonlight, which a moment before had bathed the whole landscape, seemed now to concentrate its white rays with all the force of a spotlight on the tall, sinuous form

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of the woman. The masses of red hair had broken loose and fell about her shoulders, and her big, shining eyes looked neither to the left nor to the right, but always straight ahead at the two dark figures flying up the hill before her.

"Come on, Phil," cried Werden, "let's see the finish," and the two Northerners hurried on in the wake of the mob.

Had Mohr been alone, it is possible that he might have made good his escape, but just at the entrance to the old bridge, at the very top of the hill, Dolly stumbled and fell to her knees. Even then escape was perhaps possible to the man, but he stopped and, bending over the girl, gently raised her to her feet. The leaders had come up to the runaways by now and, with his arms about her shoulders, Mohr looked calmly into the eyes of the threatening crowd. They stood just at the edge of the bridge, so that the moonlight fell full on the pale, scared face of the girl and the hard, ugly features of the Pole. The cheap bravado that he had learned among the criminal playmates of his youth had returned to him, and there was a smile in his black eyes, and his lips curled into an ugly sneer as he looked into the flushed, angry faces of the men about him. Perhaps it was

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the pity they felt for Larrabee's girl, whom they all had known since she was a child, or perhaps it was something in the brazen attitude of the man, but for one reason or another the leaderless mob remained silent. The stragglers had all come up by now, and gradually the crowd spread out and formed a complete circle, several rows deep, about the couple, thus cutting off all possible escape. Mohr took his arm from about Dolly's shoulders and, gently pushing her back of him, swung slowly toward that half-circle of the mob standing in the sombre shadows of the covered bridge. The boy still stood in the white glare of the moonlight, but the men he faced were as well protected by the darkness as if they had been concealed behind a barrier.

"Well," he said, "what are you going to do about it?"

The answer came from somewhere in the closely huddled mass of dark figures facing him. There was the sharp bark of a revolver, a blinding blaze of light, and the little figure of the boy in the centre of the group crumpled slowly up and slid through Dolly's nerveless arms to the dusty road. The girl rested her lover's head on her knee; with one hand she held his hot face closely against her breast, and with the

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other she gently pressed the skirt of her white dress against a dark spot on his shirt. The little crowd about the two runaways remained quite silent and motionless. Her face drawn and white as the moonlight, the girl looked slowly about at the circle of dark figures before her, and then she turned back to her sweetheart.

"Who was it that shot you?" she asked. "Tell me, won't you, Max?"

Mohr looked at her, smiled, and then closed his eyes and shook his head.

"I don't know," he whispered. "Honest to God, Dolly, I don't know who he was. He was a stranger. I never seen him before."

Old man Larrabee pushed his way through the crowd and shuffled slowly out from the shadows of the bridge into the moonlit road. For a moment he looked steadfastly into the now open eyes of the actor.

"I shot you," he shouted, "you mutt, you city pup! I shot you, and you know I shot you."

As if by way of protest, Mohr slowly shook his head and once more closed his eyes. "All right," he mumbled, "that's all right. Have it your own way."

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Four of the men picked up the boy and started to carry him down the hill. Dolly walked at his side, holding his hand, and the crowd straggled slowly after them.

Hyde looked about for Werden, but could not find him. In the distance he saw the train which was to take them North, slowly backing down the siding. There were but a few minutes to spare, and so he left the crowd and, running down the bank, started along the yards toward the car which he had left an hour before. On the rear platform he found Werden waiting for him.

"Have you got a flask in your bag?" he asked. "The events of the evening have given me quite a thirst. Besides, I think it would be just as well for us to lock ourselves up in our stateroom until we get away from here. I'm not very keen about being called as a witness."

"All right," Werden said, "our new stateroom will be ready in a few minutes. The porter is making it up now."

"Our new stateroom?" Hyde asked. "What's the matter with the old one?"

"Estelle La Rue has that."

"Estelle *who*?" Hyde asked.

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"Estelle Le Rue—Beauty—La Rue of Mohr and La Rue. I'm giving her a trip to New York."

There was a sudden jolting of the cars, the grating sound of the coupling of air-brakes, and the train moved slowly forward.

"Why?" asked Hyde.

"Why?" repeated Werden. "Because she shot Mohr."

Hyde pressed his lips into a straight line, and looked back at the moonlit hill and the little body of men carrying their human burden slowly down the road toward the town.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

Werden nodded. "Quite. When Larrabee was telling how he did it, I stumbled on to La Rue hiding behind a girder with a smoking revolver in her hand. Then I raced her over the bridge, down the bank on the other side, and locked her up for the night in our stateroom."

"That's all right for La Rue," said Hyde, "but how about old Larrabee? Why did he say he did it?"

Werden smiled. "That's easy. In the first place, he's a Southern gentleman—he told us so himself. He also knows that no jury in this State would con-

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vict a father for protecting his daughter; and, besides, you forget that he thought La Rue was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. Men always seem to be doing foolish things for beautiful women. Even you and I are taking a bit of a chance for one just now."

The train crawled slowly along past the dirty roads of now darkened shops and fruit-stands and "Larrabee's Place"; stopped for a moment at the station and, then, as if thoroughly tired of Clifton Junction, gave a snort from its engine and hurried on its way to the North.

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JEANNE NORRIS threw off her dripping rain-coat in the hallway and came into the dimly lighted drawing-room tugging slowly at her wet gloves. Under the orange glow of a heavily shaded lamp in the corner, her husband was reading some important-looking legal papers, but at the sound of the rustle of his wife's dress he glanced up, nodded, and again turned his attention to the papers. Mrs. Norris crossed the room and, with her hands clasped behind her, stood before the broad stone hearth. For a few minutes, save for the ticking of the high clock in the corner and the crackling of the logs in the fireplace, there was a complete silence, and, then, with a sigh, half of weariness, half of irritation, Norris let the papers he had been reading fall to the floor.

"Did your walk in the rain do you any good?" he asked.

Mrs. Norris shook her head slightly and, even in the soft, dimmed lights of the room, her husband

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could see her pale, sensitive lips barely waver into a smile—a smile, however, wholly without mirth. "Not much good," she said. "I should have to take a very, very long walk to do that, and it would have to be all in one direction."

Norris put his hands before him, palm to palm, and slowly joined the tips of his long, tapering fingers. "And what would the direction be?" he asked.

His young, pretty wife looked at him, and again her lips broke into the same mirthless smile. "Oh, any old way," she said, "so long as it led away from all this."

"From all this?" he repeated slowly.

"Yes, from this room and this house and—and——"

"Go on, please," he said.

"Oh, very well, I'll go on. And you."

Norris's keen, intelligent eyes wandered from the straight, lithe figure at the fireplace to his finger tips, and then to the ceiling, and then back to the eyes of his wife, which were now steadily fixed upon him. When he spoke his voice was low and not without sympathy. "I suspected, indeed I knew, that you haven't been very happy of late, Jeanne, but I

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had no idea it was as bad as all that. You're quite sure it isn't the rotten weather we've been having lately, or that you aren't feeling very fit?"

Still looking him fairly in the eyes Mrs. Norris shook her head. "No, it isn't the weather, bad as it is, and I never felt better in my life—never. I'm just tired of the whole game. I'm twenty-five and I'd like to be treated as if I were twenty-five, not as if I were a piece of furniture or the oldest living inhabitant and a great-grandmother of sixty children. Why, honestly, David, I've seen you look at a bronze or one of your old ceramics with a lot more affection than you have looked at me for the last year or so, a lot more. I suppose I'm too young or you're too old. I don't know."

Norris bit his thin, pale lip and once more his glance travelled swiftly about the room. "You knew the difference in our ages when I married you," he said calmly enough. "Surely there was no attempt at deception about that, or about anything else for that matter. Haven't I given you everything you wanted, or certainly everything you asked for?"

"Everything," she said, "everything that money could buy. Everything except the love and affection and the little foolish attentions that a woman craves

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from her husband. You work downtown all day and you work here all evening—that is, you do when you don't go to your club."

Norris started to speak, but, suddenly giving way to her increasing anger, Jeanne raised her hand to stop him. "I know what you're going to say," she threw at him. "You're going to say that you have to work as hard as you do to buy me dresses and new cars and to make enough money to run this very beautiful and expensive home for me. Well, I could get along with fewer dresses and fewer cars and fewer servants if I had a little more attention or affection or whatever you choose to call it. I'm just tired of it all."

"Have you thought of a remedy?" Norris asked.

Jeanne drew herself to her full height and folded her arms across her breast. "No," she said, "there is no remedy. It was my own fault. I knew perfectly well the man I was marrying. You had things and could do things for me in a worldly way that the other men who wanted to marry me couldn't. I appreciated all that at the time, and my mother did, and I suppose you did, too. I was just an ambitious, ill-advised little fool who got her values mixed. I'd always heard that love between married

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people died out in a short time, anyhow, and that when a girl did wake up from her rosy dreams it was better to find herself married to a man who could give her limousines than to a man who couldn't. I don't believe that now, but I did then. It's all my fault. I'm blackguarding myself, not you. Nobody knows better than I do that I made my own bed, and I'm willing to go ahead and lie in it; but you must allow me to toss about a bit once in a while."

Norris smiled and shrugged his shoulders. "All right, Jeanne," he said, "toss about as much as you like. But, to be quite fair, how do you know that you would have found this perfect love with any of the men who wanted to marry you? I don't think you mentioned the number, did you?"

"No, I didn't," Jeanne shot at him, "but I can. There were four; four perfectly good suitors, all reputable young men, and most of them what you and my mother, for instance, would call fairly eligible; and they were all very much in love with me."

"I suppose so," David said a little wearily. "And I suppose that when you refused them they were all broken-hearted and their lives were ruined entirely. And I suppose it is equally true that they all told

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you so and said if you ever needed a friend that they were always at your command and would do anything in this world to serve you."

"They did," Jeanne snapped; "all of them."

"Well," asked her husband, "were their lives ruined? Has any of the four died of a broken heart, or, as a matter of fact, have you ever had cause to call on one of them to make good his promise to do anything you asked of him?"

"No, you're quite right," Jeanne said. "That is, I haven't until now."

Norris got up and crossed the room near to where his wife stood, sat on the arm of a big leather chair, and laced his hands over his knee. "Now, Jeanne," he said, "just try to be fair. Do you believe for one moment that you are anything in the lives of any one of those four men? Do you believe that any one of them is still under your control in the slightest degree? Do you honestly think that if you were to call on any one of them to make a real sacrifice for you he would do it? Because I don't."

Mrs. Norris drew her lips into a straight, hard line and the blood rushed to her delicate pink-and-white face. "I do," she said. "I most assuredly do. All men aren't like you, David. There's a good

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deal of chivalry and romance left yet in this hard old world."

"But be reasonable, my dear," David argued. "Those men must have proposed to you at least five years ago, and meantime they have naturally found other interests. I've no doubt most of them are married. That alone would prove that their lives were not altogether ruined, and it's only natural to suppose that they have very probably passed entirely beyond your influence. Who were they anyhow?"

Jeanne slowly turned her back on her husband and stood staring into the fire as if to find the inspiration for her next words in the dancing flames. Suddenly she turned and faced him. "All right," she said, "I'll tell you who they were; and I believe that every one of them would to-day do anything I wanted of him."

"Anything?" David asked.

"Anything," she repeated doggedly.

"Suppose," Norris said, "mind you, I said 'suppose,' you asked one of them to run away with you?"

Jeanne smiled up at the ceiling. "That's funny," she said. "I wondered if you weren't going to ask me that. Why, of course, any one of them would. I'm just as sure of that as I am sure that I would

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be happier with any of the four, even under those criminal conditions, than I am with you."

"Are you going to tell me who they are?" Norris asked, still unruffled. "I suppose I could make a pretty good guess."

"You needn't try to guess," Jeanne said; "I told you that I would tell you their names. The first man who ever proposed to me was Mayhew McCullough."

Norris folded his arms, smiled grimly and shook his head. "A. Mayhew McCullough!" he said. "Poor old A. Mayhew! Why, Jeanne, you know that he's proposed to every débutante in town for the last twenty years. It's just a habit he fell into when he was young. He never could break himself of it, and no girl was brave enough to cure him of the vice by marrying him. A. Mayhew's a bad start, Jeanne."

Jeanne herself realized that she had made an unpropitious beginning, and, besides that, she resented extremely her husband's placid and tolerant manner. "Oh, Mayhew's not so bad," she said; "not so bad, believe me."

"Of course he's not bad," Norris laughed. "He's not bad at all at a tea. He's just as necessary to

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a tea as the pink candle shades, or the flowers on the piano, or the teapot, or the buttered toast. And as a cotillon leader he shows an absolute touch of genius; *but* he does propose to every girl before she learns that a man who leads men in a ballroom seldom leads them in war, or downtown, or wherever the business district happens to be. Do you believe, Jeanne, that A. Mayhew would elope with any woman that ever lived? Why his mind doesn't extend further than the four corners of an engraved wedding invitation, and the tint of his ushers' ties would mean more to him than the honeymoon. Next!"

Jeanne's delicate face flushed scarlet and she further showed her anger in a sudden tossing of her chin in the general direction of her husband. "The second man who proposed to me," she said, trying to be calm, "was 'Ned' English."

Norris screwed up his mouth and nodded his head in approval. "'Ned's' an entirely different proposition—a perfectly eligible *parti*. Fat, good natured, easily led—that is, by his wife—and guaranteed not to kick nor bite nor interfere. I think you should probably have married 'Ned,' but you didn't. You made the mistake and it's too late to rectify it. 'Ned' would be the first man to answer

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your call for help and the last one to elope with you."

"How do you know he wouldn't elope with me?" Jeanne asked hotly.

Norris swung his knee between his hands and smiled up at her cheerfully. "How do I know? Because his wife won't let him. Who was the third lovelorn swain?"

For a moment Jeanne hesitated. "I don't believe you'll remember him—Peter Carter."

Norris looked up at the ceiling and crinkled his eyebrows as if deep in anxious thought.

"I'm afraid you've got me there, my dear," he said; "I don't remember Carter." And then his brow suddenly unclouded and he fairly laughed aloud. "Why, of course I do. I remember Peter Carter. He was a particularly unsuccessful lawyer with a penchant for poetry and literature on the side. Haven't seen or heard of him for years. Have you?"

Jeanne nodded. "Yes, I've seen him once or twice on the street, but not to speak to. I'm afraid he hasn't done very well. He looked sort of poor and half-starved and generally discouraged. Rather made a point of avoiding me. Dear old Peter! I think he was about the finest man I ever knew."

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"Then if he's as fine as all that," David interrupted, "you may be sure he's too fine to run away with another man's wife. Who was the fourth poor soul whose life you ruined?"

"'Phil' Burnham. I know you know 'Phil.'"

"Rather," Norris said. "And he's the last man in the world who would elope, even with you."

"Why?"

"Why! Because he's the living embodiment of all the virtues and the standard-bearer of every tradition known to man. 'Phil' follows conventions as a hound follows the smell of a fox. He's a vestryman in the church, and a leader in any old reform movement that comes along, social and political. Why, 'Phil' is the only real amateur patriot I know, and he'd run from scandal as a rabbit would from a boy with a shotgun. I'll bet he laid out his entire career before he was fifteen. He's nothing but a human calendar. The fact that you didn't marry him was only an incident, and he promptly married his second choice so as to keep up to his schedule, which probably called for a marriage at that particular time. Am I right? Didn't 'Phil' marry Lucy very soon after he had proposed to you?"

Jeanne nodded. "Yes, in about six months."

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Norris smiled. "I thought so. Besides, 'Phil' plays bridge with me regularly every Saturday afternoon at the club, and a man doesn't play bridge with a man one day and run away with his wife the next."

By way of answer Jeanne turned wearily toward the fire. "All right, David; all right," she said; "you have all their names now."

"Well," said Norris, "now that you've told me who they were do you still think you have any influence with any of them? Why, there's not one of them you could now call even an intimate friend."

"No," Jeanne admitted, "you're quite right—not one of them I could now call an intimate friend. But do you think that that would make me lose faith in them? There are very few women who see much of their old friends after their marriage. Wives must of necessity put up with their husbands' friends. 'Phil' is the only one of those men you know at all well, and you generally see him at the club. He only comes here when Lucy brings him to a dinner or something."

Norris stood up and tried to lay his hand on his wife's arm, but she moved away. "My, but you're

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an obstinate child," he said; "I dare you to put any one of them to the test."

Jeanne's eyes flashed with injured pride and indignation. "All right," she whispered; "I'll dare—all four of them."

"You mean," her husband asked, "that you would voluntarily dare to be humiliated by four different men? That you would dare to ask them to this house and suggest that they run away with you?"

Mrs. Norris smiled pleasantly into her husband's half-amused, half-wondering eyes. "I would," she said.

"When?"

"Any time. Now; to-morrow."

"Good!" said David. "I think the lesson will do you a lot of good and may even bring you to your senses. Ask the four of them here to-morrow, married ones and all. And, furthermore, I'll make you a sporting proposition—that is, I will on one condition."

Jeanne nodded. "Go on," she said.

"Well, if any one of them consents to elope with you—and remember I said 'consents,' not necessarily actually elopes with you—I'll give you ten thousand dollars. If you decide not to go ten thousand dollars

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will make fine pin-money for you. If you do decide to leave me it will give you something to start your new life on. You'll need it."

"And the condition?" she asked.

"That I be allowed to overhear the conversations between you and these men."

"You mean that you want to be present?"

"Not at all. I should have to be concealed in some convenient place where I could hear just what was said."

Jeanne glanced at her husband with a look of ill-concealed contempt and shrugged her shoulders. "I wonder if there is another man in the world," she said, "who would suggest such a thing to his wife. A deliberate eavesdropper, eh? Well, I'm going through with it just to teach *you* a lesson, David, a lesson that you will remember all of your life."

"Good!" said Norris. "It's agreed then—to-morrow. And, believe me, Jeanne, it's not I who am to get the unforgettable lesson."

On the afternoon following, just as the clock struck four, the doorbell rang and A. Mayhew McCullough was shown into the Norrises' drawing-room. It was some moments before the sleek and

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dapper little man of something past middle age discovered Mrs. Norris sitting in a corner of the dimly lighted room, and but a few feet distant from the heavy curtains, which separated the drawing-room from the dining-room. His manner, as always, was effusive and, with much enthusiasm, he expressed his gratitude for this unexpected opportunity for a cozy chat with his old friend. Jeanne had always been known for a certain fragile, flower-like beauty, of which her five years of married life had robbed her not at all, and she had seen to it that on this particular occasion she had never looked more pretty nor more girlish.

With a high-pitched, unnatural voice her visitor inquired eagerly after her health and that of her husband. "And why don't we see you about more?" he added. "We miss you terribly. Why, it was only the other night I——"

Jeanne pulled herself slightly forward in her chair and there was something in her look and manner that caused McCullough suddenly to cease his chatter and that brought a kind of mild terror to his anæmic heart; there was that in Jeanne's eyes that seemed to portend nothing short of tragedy. Fairly certain of ultimate failure with this, the first of her four

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lovers, and anxious only to have the scene over, Jeanne deliberately hurried on to her downfall. "Mayhew," she began, "because, even if I have seen but little of you of late, you will always be Mayhew to me, I am in trouble, very great trouble."

McCullough glanced at Jeanne's serious eyes and, then, as if in search of some excuse for immediate flight, quickly about the room. He twisted his pearl-gray gloves between his well-cared-for hands, and uttered a startled staccato sigh.

"You once told me," Jeanne hurried on, "that you loved me; that if the time should ever come when I needed your help I could depend on you; that any wish I might make would not only be a command, but a blessing to you. You remember that, don't you, Mayhew?"

McCullough tried hard to say that he did, but his throat and lips were parched and the words he would have uttered ended in a sort of a clicking sound. Jeanne continued with breathless haste: "Now the time has come when I must ask you to make good that promise. I'm not happy, Mayhew. I want to get away."

"Get away?" he stammered.

"Yes, get away; get away from all this." Her

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eyes swept the room and returned to gaze steadfastly into those of the now terrified McCullough. "I must leave this home and David. I want to begin life over again and with the man I should have married years ago. Will you take me away with you, Mayhew?"

The very awfulness of the situation seemed to arouse McCullough to a certain mental activity, and, at least in part, to restore his power of speech. "My position," he began, "is most difficult. A few days ago, even last Sunday, I was free to do anything you asked."

Jeanne's pretty, cupid-bow lips curled into a smile of disdain. "Then I am to understand that your love for me has died since last Sunday?"

"Not at all," McCullough stammered, "but last Monday I got engaged."

Jeanne turned a withering glance on her visitor and said simply, "Oh!" but the one word was fraught with a world of cynicism.

"Not exactly engaged," the poor little man hurried on. "I only proposed. It was at the Boltons' dinner Monday night, and after dinner I proposed to Elsie Bolton."

"It must have been a particularly good dinner,"

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Jeanne answered with intolerable scorn. "If I remember correctly Elsie is the very small, very black Bolton girl with the slight mustache on her upper lip."

With a few, quick, automatic nods McCullough admitted the truth of Jeanne's description. "She's a débutante," he said; "Elsie's only eighteen." His tone was apologetic, and his words were evidently intended to give the impression that youth was Elsie's only fault, and that, no doubt, she would eventually outgrow her present lack of good looks.

"And she accepted your proposal, of course?" Jeanne asked with a great show of mock graciousness.

McCullough drew a long breath and shook his head. "Not exactly," he admitted. "She's to let me know definitely to-morrow night at the Bayards' dance for the débutantes."

Jeanne slowly got up from her chair and, drawing herself to her full height, slightly inclined her head in the direction of her guest, who, at this first sign that the interview was over, fairly sprang to his feet.

"And while awaiting your answer from Miss Bolton," Jeanne said in icy tones, "you would

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prefer not to embark on any other affair of the heart?"

McCullough timidly stretched out his hand and, with frightened eyes, glanced into the hard, uncompromising eyes of his hostess. "That's it," he mumbled. "It wouldn't be exactly fair to Elsie, would it?"

Jeanne did not deign to take the outstretched hand nor to answer the question, but, as if to show the interview was definitely at an end, once more she slightly inclined her head, this time in the general direction of the door.

Only too happy to be free, the dapper little man somehow, half stumbling, half running, made an absurd exit from the room, and Jeanne dropped back into her chair.

As the sound of the closing of the front door reached the drawing-room Norris appeared between the curtains which led to the dining-room. He was smiling genially and just about to light a cigar.

"Don't smoke," she commanded. "They'd smell the smoke."

"All right, my dear," David said, and blew out the lighted match. "Who comes next?"

"'Ned' English. I asked him at four-thirty."

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"Fine," David laughed, "and, if I remember the rest of the programme correctly, Peter Carter is to be here at five, and 'Phil' at half-past five." Still smiling, Norris looked down at his wife. "Really, Jeanne," he said, "haven't you had enough? I'll give you the ten thousand and let's call it off."

But Jeanne only tightened her lips and shook her head. "No, David," she said, "I'm going through with it now. There are three more of them left; you'll get your lesson yet."

Just as Norris was about to answer her the electric bell of the front door rang again, and, with a nod, David disappeared between the curtains.

English came into the room, smiling and cheerful, and with both hands stretched out toward Jeanne, just as he had gone through life, smiling and cheerful, and with both hands stretched out to all the world.

"Hullo, Jeanne!" he said. "Haven't seen you for an age. So glad you rang me up. What's the row?" Still holding her hands he looked into her troubled eyes. "Why, Jeanne, dear," he said, "what is it? Don't tell me that you're really in trouble—you of all people. Why, you poor, dear kid, tell me all about it."

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The very heartiness and sincerity of his kindness made Jeanne more nervous than she had been before his coming, and she hurried on with her carefully prepared speech. "Five years ago," she began, "you promised to come to me whenever I sent for you."

"Well, Jeanne," English laughed, "here I am."

"You promised," she went on, "that you would do anything for me that a man could do for a woman."

"Did I?" her guest said, screwing up his mouth. "All right; I'll take your word for it. I certainly would do a lot for you. What is it you want me to do, anyhow?"

"I've had trouble with David. I'm going to leave him. I want to go to some country where I will never see him again and where I can be happy. I'm sorry that the idea had to come from me, but I want you to go with me. Will you go?"

English wrinkled his forehead and looked at her as if he were not at all sure of her sanity. "What do you mean?" he gasped. "Elope; run away?"

Jeanne nodded. "Yes, elope; run away."

Her one-time admirer put out his hand and laid it gently on her shoulder. "I certainly will not run away with you," he said. "You don't know what you're saying, Jeanne. You don't want a change of

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husbands. You want a change of doctors. Sit down a minute. Let's talk it over calmly."

Jeanne sat down facing the fire. "What's the use of talking it over calmly?" she said, her anger thoroughly aroused. "Why don't you refuse at once and let's have it over? It's not a matter to talk over calmly. If you cared for me, if you wanted to be true to your promise, you wouldn't want to talk it over."

"May I smoke?" English asked, quite unruffled.

Jeanne shrugged her shoulders. "If you want to," she said. "It's so like a man to want to smoke at a time like this. Suppose you had asked me to run away with you and I had stopped to powder my nose?"

English chuckled, lighted a cigar and took his stand before the hearth, and, as he did so, Jeanne was sure she heard a match struck just behind the portières where her husband was sitting.

"The trouble is, my dear Jeanne," he began, "that your scheme doesn't work out right—never has, never will. I'm sorry you're not happy with 'Dave.' I know he's a bit dry and a rather cold proposition, but really he's a pretty fair husband as husbands go nowadays. But even if he were worse, a whole lot

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worse, there's no happiness in this running away with some other woman's husband. I suppose you'd like to sail away to some land of orange sunshine and turquoise skies and have a villa perched on a hill covered with groves of olive trees. Well, there are just such places, and there's lots of people have tried them under exactly the conditions you are suggesting now. You can find any number of them scattered all along the Riviera; nice little cottages, each with a husband living with some other man's wife. At least there were the last time I was over there, and I'm quite sure that they're there yet and will be for years to come; there's no other place for them to go. Sometimes they take a little trip to Paris, or Florence; or Venice, and, then, when they've met a few of their old friends who quite properly give them a good snub, they sneak back to the little cottage, which in their hearts they loathe. It's not a pretty life."

Jeanne stared into the fire and shook her head. "You men forget so quickly," she said. "You conjure up any old picture to suit your argument and your convenience. I have known women who could be happy with the men they love anywhere, any place, any time, always."

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English shook his head, "No, Jeanne," he said, "you're wrong; not under those conditions. Convention is probably at fault, but it's quite inexorable. It may be a fixed game, but if you break the rules you're thrown out. There are a lot of things a woman can do that are forgiven and forgotten, and there are more that a man can do; but there are certain things that are never forgotten nor forgiven. For instance, a man can't cheat at cards, and a man or a woman can't run away with another man's wife or another wife's husband, as the case may be, and hope to get away with it. It's one of those things that sticks to you all your life, and when you die it goes on living after you, to curse your children. I tell you, Jeanne, love under those conditions don't last. The mere fact that they've cut themselves off from the rest of the world is bound to make a man and a woman hate each other. They're prisoners, prisoners for life; and the worst of it is that they have imposed their own sentence—a few days, or weeks, or perhaps months of happiness, and then an endless stretch of years of exile, outcasts, just existing together, friendless, childless. They devote the best part of their lives to getting back, but did you ever know the case of a woman who got back? I

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never did. No, Jeanne, it does not work out. Try the more respectable method of going back to visit your mother for a while, and if that won't do, and you find you don't want to go back to your husband, get a divorce or a separation. But don't try to beat out tradition, because it never lost a fight yet." He tossed his cigar into the fire. "Good-by, Jeanne," he said, "and don't be foolish. Think it over, and the next time we meet we'll have a good laugh over it." He pulled out his watch, glanced at it and shoved it back into his pocket. "It's very late! I've got to be getting back to the Missus and the kids. Give my regards to 'Dave,' won't you?"

Jeanne got up and held out her hand. "No," she said-smiling, "I won't promise to do that. Good-by. You used to be a very amusing person, Ned, but I fear married life has dulled your sense of humor. Don't get too soggy and prosaic, will you? And just try to remember that there are other things in the world besides toasted slippers and a dressing-gown."

"I promise." English laughed and shook her hand warmly. He crossed the room, but at the doorway turned back to her. "Thank you, Jeanne, for the compliment you've paid me anyhow. I appreciate

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it greatly. I'm only sorry I can't tell my wife. I haven't been able to make her jealous for years."

"That's all right," Jeanne said, "but the next time a girl asks you to elope just stay away from her. It's a poor time for sermons and I don't think you're a very good preacher. Good-by."

Once more she turned toward the dining-room and saw the curtains opened just far enough to give her a momentary glance at the face of her husband, a glimpse sufficient to show that his face wore a grin of satisfaction and of triumph.

As the clock in the drawing-room chimed out the hour of five, Peter Carter, the third of her former suitors, was ushered into Jeanne's presence. He was a tall, spare young man, with prematurely gray hair, and his white, bloodless face was heavy with shadows and deep lines. Even in the dim light Jeanne could see that his clothes were of another day and much worn, and that his linen, although clean, was badly frayed. The old, young man bowed low over her proffered hand, and, then, for some moments, stood looking into her pretty eyes.

"Five years," he said. "That's a long time with some of us, but I think—indeed, I know—that you are younger and prettier than ever. You won't

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mind me saying that, because, you see, I have grown into an old man while you are still only a girl."

Jeanne went back to her chair before the hearth and the visitor sat on the far side of a table, a few feet distant.

"I have not seen you, Mrs. Norris," he went on, "for five years, and after that time you send for me. When I got your message I hoped, impossible as it may seem, that I might be of some slight service to you." He glanced across the table at her and smiled a boyish, friendly smile, but it was quite lost on Jeanne as she was still staring into the fire. "Do you remember—?" he went on. "But then of course you wouldn't. Why should you?"

Jeanne glanced up and saw that her visitor was blushing and regarding her with much confusion.

"Go on," she said, "please."

"I was going to ask you," Carter continued, "if you have forgotten a promise I made you. It was just after I had asked you to marry me, and—and when you had refused I said that if I could ever be of service to you I would come to you from any distance. And you—you see, you were very young then—took my hand and asked me to make that promise, and I made the promise. I remember that

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so well because—well, because it was the last time that we ever met. You don't remember, do you?"

"Yes," Jeanne whispered, "I remember. It was because of that promise that I sent for you."

Carter bowed his head. "I wish," he said, "I only wish you knew how grateful, how very grateful I am. But, Mrs. Norris, to be quite frank, I know of no one so poor who could or would turn to me."

"I'm so sorry, Peter," she said. "You mean that things have not gone very well with you?"

Carter glanced across the table at the sympathetic, pretty eyes, and his thin, pale lips broke into the semblance of a smile. "No," he said, "I haven't been very successful. I haven't been successful at all. Since I failed to win you the word 'success' has had no place in my career. Only the other day I came across some verses I wrote years ago about a youth, whom I compared to a battleship steaming out on life's seas to fight the world, and I'm afraid I always rather pictured myself as the youth." Carter turned his eyes from Jeanne and stared into the fire-place. "A battleship!" he went on. "Why, I'm no better than a derelict. A police-court lawyer and a hack writer for the 'movies' and the dime-novel publishers."

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He got up and stood before the hearth and clasped his hands behind his back. And, then, after a few moments of silence, he suddenly seemed to pull himself together and he threw back his narrow shoulders.

"Forgive me," he went on, "I didn't come here to tell you about my troubles, but just to see you again. Your voice made me remember the old days and the difference. Please tell me about yourself; you surely have no troubles. Such a wonderful home, and it seems as if I were always reading about your husband's success and his celebrated cases."

Jeanne nodded. "Yes, that is all very true. David has had a wonderful success, and the house, I suppose, is everything any woman could desire for a home. But, Peter, I'm not happy. That's what I asked you here to tell you. I'm not happy—not happy at all, Peter."

Carter looked at her and smiled incredulously. "Not happy?" he repeated. "Just what do you mean?"

Jeanne got up from her place before the fire and, walking over to where he stood, held out both her hands toward him, and Peter took them in his and held them tightly.

"Go on," he said and his tense voice scarcely rose

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above a whisper. At last victory seemed within her grasp and Jeanne hurried on to her triumph and to her husband's downfall.

"I'm tired," she said, "oh, so tired, Peter; tired of my home and tired of him. You, yourself, have reminded me of your promise. I asked you here to make good that promise. I want you to take me away."

Carter held her hands close and gazed steadily into her big, innocent eyes. "Take you away?" he said.

"Yes, Peter," she whispered, "that's it; take me away anywhere—anywhere away from here, anywhere where we would be always together. You are the only man I have ever loved. I didn't know that five years ago, but I know it now. And it's not too late, is it, Peter? Don't say it's too late, please!"

Carter suddenly dropped her hands and clasped his own tightly behind his back. "Yes, Jeanne," he said. "I'm sorry, but it's too late—just five years too late."

"But your promise?" she begged.

"My promise! If I break my promise to you I break faith with but one woman. If I keep my promise I break faith with myself—with forty years

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of upright living. I break faith with society, and law and order, and everything that stands for decency and high living and honor. I am poor enough, God only knows; poor in everything except my ideals, but I am still rich in them. The standard-bearer may fall, but the drummer boy or the water carrier or the camp follower in rags may carry on the colors. It makes no difference; the colors are still the colors."

With lowered head, she put out her hand. "Good-by, Peter," she said. "I know what you mean. I understand; you were always like that; good-by."

Carter bowed low over the girl's outstretched hand, so low that his lips brushed the tips of her fingers. "Good-by," he whispered. "I shall always remember you."

As Peter Carter went out of the front door Philip Burnham entered it. He came into the drawing-room, smiling, cheerful, wonderfully good-looking, and greeted Jeanne as if he had left her only a few hours before.

"It's good to see you again, Jeanne," he said. "It's fine!" He moved quickly toward her and held out his arms as if he were about to embrace her.

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Jeanne, rather terrified by the ardor of his wooing, backed away from him. "Philip," she said quickly, "do you know that this is the first time you have been in my home for months?"

"I do," Philip said crisply, "and for a very good reason."

"And the reason is?"

"Because you are the only woman I ever truly loved."

Jeanne sank slowly into her favorite chair before the fireplace, and Burnham stood a few feet away, staring steadily into her confused eyes.

"Why, Philip!" she said; "why do you say a thing like that to me? That's just the way you used to talk to me and to look at me before I married David. Are you really never going to grow up?"

"I've grown up all right," Burnham replied, laughing. "There's a great difference between growing up and outgrowing your love for a woman."

"But, Philip," Jeanne insisted, a little terrified, "you've got no right to rush in here and make whirlwind love to me like that. I'm a married woman now, and David says you are the very acme of all

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that is respectable, and that you're quite devoted to your wife and children."

"I'm sure I'm indebted to David for the good character he has given me," Philip said dryly, "and I've no doubt all he says is true. It certainly is true about my wife and children, but what's that got to do with my love for you? Men and women are supposed to marry the men and women they really love, but very often they don't. Surely you know that. When I couldn't marry you I married Lucy, because I liked her and because I believed that it is better to marry a second choice than not to marry at all. I didn't love Lucy the way I loved you any more than you loved David the way I loved you and still love you. Are you tired of him yet?"

"I am, *very*. But how did you guess?"

Philip shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, I don't know. It always seemed as if it had to happen, and, then, after five long years, when you sent me that mysterious message, to come to you at once, I guessed something was up. Instinct, I suppose. What are you going to do about it?"

"Leave him," Jeanne said. "What else is there for me to do?"

"Good!" said Burnham. "You're just in time.

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Men like 'Dave,' who think of nothing but money and give up their lives to work, are bound to snap all of a sudden. A year or two more with him and you'll be wearing a nurse's uniform and devoting your life to measuring out teaspoonfuls of medicine and counting pulse beats."

Jeanne glanced up at the strong, eager face of her visitor. "Don't you think that's rather unusual advice from a law-abiding citizen and a model husband and father?"

"No," said Burnham, "not when I'm giving it to you. Why, Jeanne, what else could possibly count against my love for you? It's just you, you, you; that's all there is to my life—you."

Jeanne looked squarely into Philip's eyes. "Do you mean that you still love me?"

"I do," Philip said. "I love you more than any man ever loved any woman. That has been said frequently before, but not by a man who has gone on loving a woman for five years after her marriage to another man; and, although I have seldom seen you during those five years, I have loved you more and more every minute of them. When you leave David, where are you going?"

"I don't know," Jeanne said; "that's why I

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wanted to see you. I was in trouble, and it was natural, after all, wasn't it, that I should turn to my oldest friend—the man who was once my best friend? Will you take me away with you, Philip?"

"I will," said Philip.

"When?"

"Now."

"How about your wife and your children and the splendid position you have made for yourself?"

"I love you," Philip said.

"You know," Jeanne went on, her victory over her husband now assured, "that to run away with me must mean your finish, your everlasting disgrace. And you mustn't forget that you are known as a friend of my husband. That is not liable to help you in the eyes of the world."

"I forget nothing," Burnham said passionately. "Jeanne, I tell you I love you and that nothing else counts. Will you go away with me now? Give me just one hour and I can stand all the disgrace and hardship that can come to any man for the rest of his life."

"All right, 'Phil,'" she said. "Will you wait for me here? I'll be ready to go in a few minutes."

Jeanne started to leave the room, but, as she did

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so, she heard the honk-honk of an automobile which evidently had stopped before the house, and then, almost immediately, the buzz of the electric bell of the front door sounded.

Burnham darted toward the window, and, drawing aside the curtains, looked out on the street. With a half-articulate cry, followed by a muttered oath, he pulled the curtains sharply together again. "Heavens, Jeanne," he whispered, "it's my wife!"

Jeanne stood as silent, and white and motionless as a marble statue.

"What'll we do?" Burnham demanded. "You must hide me. Be quick, Jeanne!"

But, instead of making an effort to hide her apparently now terrified lover, Jeanne only succeeded in uttering a few stifled sobs and backing slowly toward the dining-room door. "I won't!" she succeeded in gasping at last. "I won't hide you!"

"Good!" cried Philip; "then we'll stand together and tell her all."

He moved quickly toward Jeanne who, now, almost helpless from fright, had just enough strength left to turn and half run, half stumble, toward the dining-room curtains.

Just as she reached them young Mrs. Burnham,

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smiling and radiant, entered the doorway leading from the front hall. If, in the dim light of the drawing-room, she was at all conscious of Jeanne's tragic face she certainly did not show it in her manner.

"Hullo, Jeanne!" she said. "How are you, Philip? All ready for the trip?"

"What trip?" Jeanne gasped.

"What trip?" Mrs. Burnham echoed. "Why, our trip, or rather your trip to Florida. Don't tell me David didn't tell you about it. We start in an hour."

Before Jeanne could answer she felt her husband's arm placed gently about her shoulders. "No," he said, "I didn't tell her. I wanted it to be a surprise; so I only told her maid. She'll have everything ready on time."

Jeanne looked up into her husband's kindly eyes. "Just what do you mean?" she asked.

"Well," David said, "after our chat yesterday afternoon, when you seemed so depressed and tired of things in town, I had a long talk with 'Phil' at the club and we arranged for his visit this afternoon to brighten you up a bit, as it were, and then for Lucy to join us all here later. Now I'm going to forget business and we're going to have dinner right away,

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and after dinner we four start for Palm Beach, and a month of orange sunshine, and palm trees and purple skies. How about it?"

For answer Jeanne put her arm through David's, and, with wrinkled brow, looked up at him with tearful, smiling eyes.

HER MAN

GRETТА ST. JOHN let herself into the flat, and promptly stumbled over the hat-rack which projected itself far across the dark hallway.

“Darn those set-pieces,” she swore softly to herself, and then cautiously groped her way down the narrow passage.

Once in her own bedroom, she lit the single gas jet, tossed her sailor hat and her handsomely initialed but empty reticule on the bed, tousled her pretty yellow curls before the mirror, and smiled with pleasure and no small degree of satisfaction at the pretty face in the looking-glass. Her cheeks were ruddy and her big, blue eyes glistened after her long walk from the theatre through a series of May showers; and, as a matter of fact, Gretta had ample cause to smile at the reflection of the delicate, piquant beauty of her face and of her slender, supple, little figure. She sat on the edge of the bed and took off her russet shoes, dark and soggy from

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the rain and the mud of the streets, and then carefully felt the soles of her feet.

When she discovered that her brown cotton stockings were quite dry, there was just a shade of disappointment in her face, and she glanced tentatively at a pair of patent leather pumps at the end of the bed. For a moment she hesitated and then mumbled, "Why not?" Quickly she went over to the bureau, opened the lower drawer and took out a pair of neatly folded black silk stockings.

"Why not?" she once more argued aloud as she returned to her seat on the edge of the bed and started to replace the cotton stockings with the transparent black silk ones. "Why not, indeed!" Gretta ran on. "It's always safer to change your stockings, anyhow, and then these are so very much prettier, and, sad to say, Gretta, it isn't every day that you have a 'swell' come to tea. As a matter of fact, you never had a real swell come to tea before!"

At last the silk stockings and the patent leather pumps had been placed where they would appear to the greatest possible advantage, and Gretta, singing as she went, hurried down the hallway to Mrs. Jessie King's sitting-room. Mrs. King was in the kitchen,

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just beyond, and, so, through the half-closed door, Gretta called her greetings to her, and then looked about the little sitting-room at the preparations which Jessie had made for the tea-party. There was a small bunch of jonquils in the vase on the piano and a branch of apple blossom stuck behind "Scene at the Death-bed of President Garfield," and just a spray over the framed copy of Kipling's "Vampire." The brown plush cover with its appliquéd scarlet roses that usually adorned the centre-table had been replaced by a white cloth which fairly shone and crinkled from its newness. On the table were the tea-things and a chocolate cake, and a large plate for the biscuit that Jessie King had prepared herself, and which she was to bake after the arrival of the distinguished guest. There were no lengths to which Jessie would not go to oblige a favorite roomer, and she loved Gretta St. John almost as if she had been her own daughter.

"It looks fine," Gretta called. "The cake's a wonder and the room is that clean and nice. It's beautiful, Jessie."

Gretta was quite sincere in her gratitude, but she did not really think that this hot, stuffy room was beautiful. She had always instinctively abhorred

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Jessie King's beloved collection of preposterous, grinning billikins as she had always hated the flowered piano cover, the stiff walnut furniture with its plush covering, and as she had come to hate every one of the innumerable photographs of Eugene Errolle with which the walls were entirely draped and which stared out at one from every nook and cranny of the sitting-room. There were pictures of Errolle in a morning suit, in his evening clothes, in the drab clothes of *Hamlet*, in the hose and leather doublet of the swashbuckler, *D'Artagnan*, in the flowing locks and graceful mantle of *Orlando*—old photographs these, taken years ago when Errolle was the justly popular leading man of a Louisville stock company. There were other pictures of him less faded and yellowed by age, taken after his hair had begun to turn gray and his face had grown heavy, after his shoulders sagged just a little and the slim waist and the piercing look of the black eyes had become but treasured memories. These last photographs were of the days when he played character parts with Melbourne's Repertoire Company through the Middle West. The days when he first met, and wooed and won Jessie King, who was playing the ingénue rôles in the same company.

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On this particular afternoon, as Mrs. King came into the sitting-room carrying a highly burnished, silver-plated sugar-bowl and cream pitcher, no one would have imagined that ten years before she had played ingénues and had played them well, and looked them well, too. Now her figure was amply rounded, even plump, and her bust seemed to fill her freshly ironed shirt-waist to overflowing, and her hips to strain the hooks and eyes of her short cloth skirt to the bursting point. But there was still much beauty in the blue, placid eyes, in the soft brown hair parted over the clear, broad forehead, in the pink and white oval cheeks and the small, sensitive, baby-like mouth. Not a suggestion of a crow's foot, nor a wrinkle, nor a shadow was there to mar the pretty, always smiling, shining round face. Jessie King carried her troubles in her big, loving heart, far removed from the sight of man and woman. The best friend she had ever had never learned the tragedy of her life either in her eyes or from her lips. But if Jessie King was brave, she was also possessed of a great hope and an infinite faith. Every night she let her stout, unwieldy body drop to her stiffened knees and asked that the good Lord would send her husband back to her, and every night, after

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her prayers were over, with a smile on her pretty lips, she went to sleep, secure in the belief that on the morrow her prayers would be answered.

Jessie set the sugar-bowl and the cream pitcher on the table with much precision, and, with her hands resting on her broad hips, regarded the general effect with a face fairly beaming with pride and satisfaction.

"Gretta dear," she said, "I think it looks fine—good enough for any swell. Now, I'll put that dish for the biscuits in the oven and we're ready for him." She turned and looked at Gretta with a smile brimful and overflowing with love.

"I like you to have your gentlemen friends come here for a cup of tea," she went on. "It's so much nicer than meeting them at restaurants. You know what I mean—just having me dodge in if it's only for a moment shows 'em you're sort of looked after and protected, and that you've got a home."

Gretta walked around the table and dropping to her knees, rested her hands on Mrs. King's broad shoulders.

"You dear, sweet, old thing," she said. "You bet it's good to have a home, and such a pretty home, too."

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The door-bell rang shrilly and Mrs. King hurried into the kitchen. Gretta opened the front door for Mr. William Chauncey, a most amusing young man, one of New York's predatory rich, who divided his hours of leisure between *jeunes-filles* dances and chorus-girl suppers and was equally popular at both.

"Charming," exclaimed Chauncey as he glanced at the tea-table and then at the overcrowded little room, "perfectly charming—so cozy and interesting." He smiled at Gretta, but almost at once his glance strayed back to the gallery of photographs and rested on a large picture of Errolle as *Claude Melnotte*. It stood on the upright piano nearby and bore the actor's autograph written in a large, bold hand.

"Pardon me, won't you, Miss St. John," Chauncey apologized, "but I have never seen so many photographs of one person in all my life. Who is Eugene Errolle?"

Gretta shook her head and nodded toward the kitchen door. "Not now," she said, "I'll tell you some other time."

"I beg your pardon," Chauncey whispered, "forgive me, won't you?"

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Gretta smiled her forgiveness, and then she and her good-looking young visitor sat down on opposite sides of the tea-table and, for a few minutes, talked of the last supper party at which they had met, and exchanged the latest gossip concerning their mutual friends of the stage.

"And now," Gretta announced, "I'm going to introduce you to my friend and protector, Mrs. King. Also, she has baked some hot biscuits for you and you must eat them, and admire them inordinately. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly," said young Chauncey, "inordinately."

Mrs. King was led from the kitchen, her round, shiny face wreathed in smiles and blushes. In one hand she held the plate of biscuits and the other she stretched out in welcome toward the visitor. She took her place at the table and Gretta helped her to a cup of tea. For a moment conversation seemed to lag, and, then, Chauncey, recognizing his responsibility, started in to do his best.

"I've just been telling Miss St. John," he began, "how fortunate she is to have so charming a home, and now that I've met her hostess I find that she is doubly fortunate."

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Jessie King blushed a brilliant scarlet. "It is nice," she said; "at least, we think so. I've been a long time getting it just right."

"So many interesting things you've collected," Chauncey suggested.

"That's right," Mrs. King admitted, "especially if you're interested in stage people. I suppose you've noticed my photographs?"

Chauncey nodded gravely. "Yes," he said, "you have some very fine ones of Mr. Eugene Errolle."

Whatever thoughts or doubts may have existed in her heart and in her mind, Jessie King smiled bravely and looked at her guest, her big blue eyes shining with a marvellous joy and pride.

"Eugene Errolle," she said, "is a *great* actor, and he's *my man*."

Chauncey hesitated, groping about for something to say. But once having seen the light in the woman's eyes and heard her speak those two words, "my man," which held all the meaning of a wonderful caress, he found that any phrase of which he could think seemed hopelessly weak and wholly inadequate to the situation. And, so, in the presence of so big a thing as this woman's love, he remained

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silent and acknowledged her words with a low bow which told her that he understood.

A few minutes later Mrs. King excused herself, and as they heard the door close behind her, Gretta settled back in her chair and nodded her assent to Chauncey's request to light a cigarette.

"Eugene Errolle," she began, "was a good stock actor of the old, heroic school, and when Jessie met him he was playing character parts in the same repertoire company in which she was the ingénue. That was about ten years ago and I suppose that she was thirty and he was forty-five or thereabouts. Anyhow, she fell in love with him and married him, and for the rest of the season they were apparently perfectly happy. Ideally happy, *she* says. And, then, one night, just before the season closed, he left her. They had both signed for the next season with the same troupe, and the outlook was apparently just as good and bright as it could be."

"He didn't leave any word," Chauncey asked, "nothing at all?"

"He left a note saying that he had unknowingly wronged her and that she must try to forgive and then forget him."

"And then?" Chauncey said.

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"Well, she forgave him all right." (Gretta glanced about the room at the gallery of photographs.) "But you can see for yourself how hard she has tried to forget him. This place is a regular shrine to Eugene Errolle."

"Why does she call herself King," asked the young man, "if she's so proud of Errolle?"

"King was her name before her marriage and she always used it on the stage. After he quit her she kept it on in the hope of getting a job. Then she got too stout to be an ingénue, and came on here, and took to keeping roomers and getting a home ready for Errolle when he wanted to come back."

For a few moments there was silence while Chauncey puffed away on his second cigarette. "But what I can't understand," he said going back to Jessie's story, "is how a fairly well-known actor could lose himself so completely, that is, if he stayed on the stage."

"He lost himself for nine whole years," Gretta said, "and then about a year ago Jessie read in *The Mirror* that he was playing lead in a melodrama in some one-night stand in Nebraska. Ever since then she buys *The Mirror* every week, as soon as it comes out, and reads about how he played at Painted Post

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or Oil Centre and that business was good and Eugene Errolle fine. He must have gotten his second wind, somehow, for he certainly gets corking notices—that is, from those water-tank towns that he plays.”

“And she never tried to see him?” Chauncey asked.

Gretta shook her head. “Nope. It seems he asked her in the note he left never to write to him nor try to see him again.”

“And she’s always done as he asked?”

“As if it were a command from Heaven.”

“What a brute,” Chauncey said, “I’d like to kick him just once myself.”

“Sometimes, I feel that way, too,” said Gretta, “and then again I don’t know that I do. I’ve heard people say who knew them when they were together that they were both absolutely happy and crazy in love with each other. He sends her money, too, and that’s in his favor. That is,” Gretta went on, “somebody sends her money. It comes in cash and is always mailed from New York, so I suppose he sends it through a friend here. Jessie couldn’t live as she does if it wasn’t for that and she spends pretty much everything she gets in fixing up the place so it’ll look nice when he comes back to her.”

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Chauncey got up and looked about for his hat and coat.

"Her man," he said smiling.

It was on the Sunday following that Jessie King showed Gretta a paragraph in *The Morning Telegraph* announcing the appearance of the favorite Western actor, Eugene Errolle, in a society drama to be produced the next night at a Broadway theatre. It was a new play by an unknown author, and could only have found an opening in New York at this particular season when most of the theatres were closed for lack of good attractions. After Jessie had pointed out the notice to Gretta, she sat down in a rocking chair and rocked slowly back and forth, and, with wide-open eyes, looked dully into space.

"Well, Jessie," Gretta said when she had read the paragraph, 'are you going to the theatre to-morrow night or any night?'"

Jessie nodded. "Yes," she said with a little catch in her voice. "You see, he didn't say anything in that letter that would mean I shouldn't see him act. You're not working now, Gretta—don't you think you could go with me? We'd sit well back where he

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couldn't see us. I wouldn't like to go alone, somehow. It's been so long, dearie, ten years—ten long years."

Gretta knelt at Jessie's feet and put her arms about the older woman's waist. "Why yes," she said, "of course I'll go. I want to go."

Monday night was very hot and close and the two women, dressed in their best shirt-waists and short cloth skirts, started early to walk to the theatre. Mrs. King bought two seats far back in the orchestra, and then they went into the hot, stuffy theatre and waited in silence for what seemed to Gretta the longest half-hour that she had ever known.

"I don't think I can stand it," Jessie whispered. "I shouldn't have come. I was a fool to come."

But Gretta soothed her as well as she could, and then the orchestra began the overture, and Jessie seemed to pull herself together, and, sitting up very straight in her chair, gazed with dry, searching eyes at the curtain, waiting for the moment that she had looked forward to for ten long years.

The part of *John Eberly*, which Errolle was to play, was that of a successful business man, the husband of a young wife. That Jessie and Gretta knew

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from the programme and the opening lines of the play, but there was no indication to show how old he was supposed to be. For ten minutes the play ran its course and then a speech of one of the minor characters announced the entrance of *John Eberly*. He came on the stage, smiling, with his hands outstretched toward his young and pretty wife. The actor was good to look upon, graceful, and easy, and very young. His likeness to Jessie's husband was altogether striking. Even Gretta could see that, but he was not the Eugene Errolle whom Jessie had married. Gretta felt the big, strong body of the woman next her suddenly relax, and she put out her hand and clasped Jessie's hand closely in her own.

"That's not Errolle," Gretta whispered, "they've put on an understudy." She glanced quickly at Jessie and found that the older woman's eyes had become suddenly dimmed but were staring with a look of wonder and a sort of fascination at the young man on the stage.

"No, Gretta," she said, "that's not an understudy. That's Eugene's son."

The same thought had come to Gretta, but she would not admit it even to herself.

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"Errolle had no son," Gretta whispered. "You know he had no son."

The older woman closed her eyes as if to shut out the glaring lights and the sight of the man on the stage. "No, my dear," she said very gently, "that's Eugene's boy. I can see the father in his face. I can see it in his walk. I tell you I can see it in his eyes. God, how I wish I hadn't come!"

Gretta turned back to the stage, and, even from the photographs, she knew that Jessie was right. When the first act was over, the two women instinctively and without a word got up and went slowly out. They followed the hot, thirsty crowd of men from the theatre down Broadway until they came to the first cross-street. This they found dark and deserted, and they turned the corner and half way up the block stopped in the shadow of a high office building. Jessie pressed her chubby hands hard against her temples and closed her eyes.

"That was an awful jolt I got," she mumbled. "I'm sorry to spoil your evening, Gretta, but I guess I'd better go home."

Gretta put her arm under that of the older woman and started to lead her toward Broadway.

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"I think you're right," she said. "You'd much better go back to the flat and lie down."

"I don't want to lie down," Jessie protested. "I want to think—think and figure out what it all means. It's the first time in ten years, that I've felt real discouraged—the first time. You go back to the show, dearie, and I'll go home alone. I want to be alone for a while, if you don't mind. I'd rather try to work it out alone—it's easier that way sometimes."

Gretta protested, but Jessie insisted that it was her wish.

"Go back to the show, dear," she said, with a feeble effort to smile, "go back and see it out, and when it's over hurry up to the flat and tell me all about—about Eugene's son and if he made a hit. Good God, how much he looks like his father—and his voice was just the same—just exactly the same. Run along, dearie—but hurry back when it's over."

Gretta watched the broad, ungainly figure moving slowly away from her, pushing her way through the sweltering crowds that filled the sidewalks.

"That's a pretty sad home-coming," she said to herself, "pretty sad. If I could only help—if I only could."

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When she reached the theatre again the curtain was just going up on the second act, and, with the exception of one man, the lobby was deserted. Instinctively she knew that he was the manager of the company, and, going straight up to him, she excused herself for speaking to him, and at once started in on the matter in hand.

"This Eugene Errolle who is playing the lead," she asked, "had a father by the same name, hadn't he? Was in the business, too, wasn't he?"

By her words as well as by her dress and manner the manager knew that Gretta was in one way or another connected with the stage, so he smiled at her graciously and screwed his cigar slowly from the left to the right side of his mouth.

"That's right," he said. "The old man sort of went to the bad and left his name to the son. Old man Errolle goes by the name of Walter Scannell now."

"Do you know where he is?" Gretta asked with great eagerness.

"I do," the manager laughed, "but I'm afraid you want to sue him for breach of promise or something."

"Don't guy," Gretta begged, "please don't guy."

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Tell me where he is. Please tell me—that is, if you know.”

“It’s a hard luck story, kid,” he said, “sure a hard luck story. He’s the property man of the same troupe his son is featured in—practically starred in.”

Gretta’s eyes flared up with excitement and she plucked nervously at the manager’s sleeve.

“You mean he is the property man with this show?”

“Sure. Eugene got him the job. He’s the property man and Eugene’s dresser on the side. That’s what he is—his own son’s valet. Sort of tough, eh, little one, for a regular fellow who was once a *matinée* idol, and played *Armande* and *Orlando*—pretty tough, eh?”

Gretta looked up at the manager and nodded.

“That’s right,” she said, “you bet it’s pretty tough. Show business is a hard game, any way you play it. Good-night, and much obliged.”

She walked from the lobby into the street. It was very hot and the crowd jostled her and confused her and she wanted so hard to be alone and to think. Somehow it seemed as if fate had put it into her young hands to repay all that Jessie King

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had done for her. "If I only could," she repeated over and over again, "if I only could."

But however great her desire to help the woman who had been as a mother to her, she knew that her task was not an easy one, and that one false step now might prove fatal to Jessie's happiness. She turned up the first side street, and, free from the crowd, walked slowly up and down, her head bowed and her hands clasped tightly behind her. At last the thoughts that crowded and confused her excited brain seemed to straighten out and her mind was clear again. The simplest plan was the best plan, after all. The decision once made, she turned back toward the theatre. With dimmed, misty eyes she looked on at the remainder of the play. She saw the people on the stage and heard them speaking, but she was quite unconscious of what they said. She heard the people about her in the audience whispering to one another during the play, and chatting aloud between the acts, and, at other times, she heard them applaud, but her mind was filled with thoughts of Jessie—her dear Jessie sitting alone in the flat, her last hope gone, and, then, of the property-man behind the scenes of whom she had heard so much, but never seen.

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When the curtain had fallen on the last act, she went slowly out and took up her stand at the stage door. One by one, or in little groups, she watched the actors come out and hurry away with friends, all of them smiling and laughing over the success of the play. At last, when she had begun to fear that she had not recognized Jessie's husband, that he had gone away, and that her quest had failed, she saw him come out of the door, and, for a moment, hesitate as if uncertain which way he should turn. To Gretta, he looked many, many years older than he did in the photographs. His hair was quite white, his shoulders stooped, the former virile, athletic figure was now almost gaunt and the spirit had gone out of his eyes entirely. Gretta approached him timidly and looked up into the drawn, gray face.

"Isn't your name Eugene Errolle?" she asked.

He looked at her and shook his head.

"Mr. Errolle," he said, "I think must have gone by this time. I'm sorry."

But Gretta stood stolidly before him and looked squarely into the tired, motionless eyes.

"I'm sorry," she explained, "awfully sorry, and I don't want to be rude, indeed, I don't, but weren't you once known as Eugene Errolle?"

HERMAN

"Yes," he said quite simply, "but that was a long time ago. Why do you ask?"

"I come from a friend," Gretta said.

"A friend," he repeated. "I'm afraid there must be some mistake. I have no friends."

"Yes," Gretta said, "one friend—a very old friend, who loves you better than her own life—Jessie."

"Jessie," he repeated, and, turning his eyes from Gretta, looked up at the deep purple sky set with its myriads of steadfast, crystal stars.

"I want to take you to her," Gretta urged, "now, right away. Please let me take you to her."

He turned his eyes back to Gretta, and, under heavy, gray brows, blinked at her uncertainly.

"Better come home," she whispered. "She's been waiting a long time."

"I could go home *now?*" he queried. "Are you sure she wants me?"

Gretta put out her hand and taking his gently in her own started to lead him slowly away from the stage door.

"Wants you?" she said. "She's never had a thought except of you since the day you left her."

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He looked at her, and, by his eyes, Gretta could see that his mind was confused and stunned.

"I can tell you about that," he said. "I mean about leaving her."

"Not me," Gretta laughed. "But you can tell *her*."

In almost complete silence, they walked slowly to Jessie's home, and, when Gretta had opened the door to the flat, she led him down the hallway to the sitting-room. Jessie was sitting at the table, her head buried in her arms.

"Jessie," Gretta whispered, and, before the older woman could raise her head, the girl tiptoed out of the room and closed the door behind her.

When Jessie saw him she gave a low cry, and, running to him, put her head on his shoulder and sobbed out the happiness that overflowed from her big, child-like heart. After a time he led her gently to a chair and begged her to be seated. It was the first word that either of them had spoken.

He stood before the empty hearth with his hands clasped behind his back, and leaned against the mantel-shelf which was adorned with many photographs of Eugene Errolle when the actor was more a

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woman's ideal of a man and much less a human wreck.

"Jessie," he began, "I must first tell you something."

"About your son?" she interrupted him, and her round, tear-stained face blazed scarlet.

"Yes," he said, "and about *her*. The day I left you, you may remember, I went for a walk and late in the afternoon I dropped in at a theatre. It was one of those cheap burlesque houses. They gave me a seat in a box, almost on the stage. The first thing I saw was a young man, not much more than a boy—but he was so like what I had been when I was young that I wanted to cry out. And then his mother came on the stage, and I understood. I had married her almost twenty years before. We were very unhappy and she left me a few months after our marriage. I had never heard that she had a son, and several years after we separated I understood that she had died. Then I met you and married you, and wronged you as much as any man can wrong a woman. As soon as she saw me, I knew that our days, I mean your days and my days, of happiness were over. She sent word by the manager to meet her after the show. I went back on the stage and

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found her and the boy waiting for me. She had grown old, and was terribly painted, and she had sunk very low on the stage and off of it, and the boy, as I soon learned, was following in her footsteps. She told me that she was tired of fighting alone and that the time had come when she was going to claim her rights. I could have divorced her easily, but, after all, you must understand, Jessie, that she was my wife, and the mother of my son."

Jessie, who was following Errolle's words with dry, wide-open eyes, nodded her assent.

"And then?" she asked.

"Then I went with her. I changed my name, and, a year later, when I had got my boy a position in a decent company, I gave my name to him. So far as my work went I sunk to her level and worse. For years I played in cheap, rotten burlesque shows. The only satisfaction I had was when I made enough money to send you something. For the last ten years I have lived in a kind of hell. There was no love between us, my position was gone, the work I was forced to do was an insult against decency, and I could no longer hold up my head or look honest men and honest women in the face. The only happiness I knew was to send you the little money I

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could save from my wages, and, from a great distance, watch my son succeed in his profession and bring back the name of Eugene Errolle to the place it once held. That's about all. It isn't a pretty story. Just a month ago, before my boy started East for his first real chance, his mother died, and I joined him. They took me on as property-man and I dress my son Eugene. He didn't want me to work because he loves me, but I liked it better—to be making my own living."

Errolle pressed his hand over his eyes as if to shut out the memory of those last ten years. Then his arm dropped impotently to his side and he looked at the woman at the table and tried to force a smile to his white, drawn lips.

"Well, Jessie," he said, "I guess that's about all—that's just how it was. I'm glad that kid looked me up and brought me here so that I could tell you myself. I wanted to see you just once and to tell you. I didn't think you'd want to see me, but she said you did. She said you'd been waiting."

He shuffled away from the fireplace, and looked about the room for his hat, and, then, his glance fell on the gallery of portraits of Eugene Errolle—the Eugene Errolle who had died ten years before. He

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looked back at Jessie, but on account of the mist in his tired eyes he couldn't see her very distinctly. And his dry, hard lips refused to utter the words he wanted so much to speak.

"You're not going already, are you?" she asked.

His answer scarcely rose above a whisper.

"Yes, Jessie, I must be going now. Good-bye to you and bless you." He stretched two trembling hands toward her.

"Why, Gene," she said, "I thought perhaps you'd come to stay, now—now that you're free."

She glanced about the overcrowded room, with its gilt wall-paper, and plush furniture and painted banjos. "I've been keeping the home waiting for you for such a long time."

Errolle had picked up his hat and stood twisting it slowly between his hands. Suddenly he looked up at Jessie, and, in her sweet, eager eyes saw the light of a kind of love that he had not known for many years.

"Do you mean," he stammered, "that after all I've done, that after you've seen the wreck I've come to be, that you still want me? That you'll marry me, Jessie, and start again?"

HER MAN

It was half an hour later when Gretta, who in bed but still very wide-awake lay staring into the darkness of her little room, heard Jessie lead Errolle down the hallway and let him out of the flat. She heard the front door close, and, then, Jessie's footsteps returning as far as her own door.

"Come in, Jessie," she called.

The older woman came in, her heavy body dropped slowly to the side of the bed, and putting her arms about Gretta she drew her closely to her breast.

"I wanted to thank you," she said, "and Him for bringing back my man to me."

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